PARADISE AFIRE

Volume 2: The Sri Lankan War, 1987-1990

ASIA@WAR SERIES

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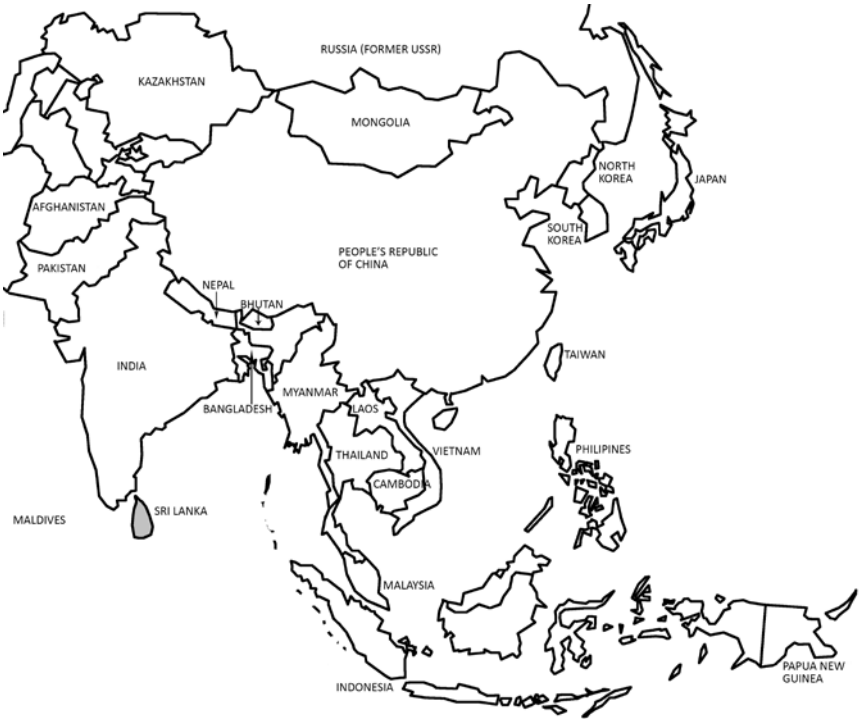


Note: In order to simplify the use of this book, all names, locations and geographic designations are as provided in *The Times World Atlas*, or other traditionally accepted major sources of reference, as of the time of the events described. For reasons of simplicity, genuine designations for Soviet/Russian-made weapons used in this book are mentioned once, and then their ASCC (or 'NATO') codes are used instead.

ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Air Base
AK	Russian for Automat Kalashnikova; general designation for a class of Soviet- or Eastern Bloc-manufactured assault rifles of 7.62mm calibre
AN	Antonov (the design bureau led by Oleg Antonov)
ATGM	Anti-Tank Guided Missile
CAS	Close Air Support
CASEVAC	Casualty evacuation
COIN	counter-insurgency
CPRF	Central Police Reserve Force
CVF	Citizen Volunteer Force
DJV	Deshapremi Janatha Viyaparaya (People's Patriotic Movement), JVP front organisation.
ENDLF	Eelam National Democratic Liberation Front, group created by the merger of TELO and PLOTE breakaway factions
EPRLF	Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front
EROS	Eelam Revolutionary Organisation
HU	Helicopter Unit
IAF	Indian Air Force
IAP	International Airport
IN	Indian Navy
INAS	Indian Navy Air Squadron
IPKF	Indian Peace Keeping Force
JOSSOPS	Joint Services Special Operations
JVP	Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (People's Liberation Front)
KIA	Killed in Action
Km	kilometre
LKR	Sri Lankan Rupee
LSSP	Lanka Sama Samaja Party (Lanka Equal Society Party)
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MANPAD(S)	man-portable air defence system(s) – light surface-to-air missile system that can be carried and deployed in combat by a single soldier
NEPG	North-Eastern Province Government
NIB	National Intelligence Bureau (Indian intelligence agency)
NSS	National Security Service (Maldives security forces)
NSSP	Nava Sama Samaja Pakshaya – New Equal Society Party
PLOTE	People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam
POW	Prisoner of War
RAW	Research and Analysis Wing (Indian intelligence agency)
SLA	Sri Lanka Army
SLAF	Sri Lanka Air Force
SLFP	Sri Lanka Freedom Party, one of the two main Sri Lankan political parties
SLN	Sri Lanka Navy
STF	Special Task Force, the Sri Lanka Police dedicated counter-insurgency unit
TELO	Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation
TNA	Tamil National Army
UNP	United National Party, main Sri Lankan political party
WIA	Wounded in Action

PREFACE

This is the second volume in a mini-series covering the history of inter-related military conflicts in Sri Lanka, which raged from 1971–2009, and is dedicated to the events that martyred the country between 1987 and 1990.

These years were indeed paramount in modern South Asian history because India launched what turned out to be its largest military intervention abroad so far. Instead of the intended peacekeeping mission, the whole venture turned into a protracted counter-insurgency campaign. While the mission of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) was later largely assessed as a failure, things are – as always – more complex. Completely surprised by and unprepared for the turn of events, the Indian Army nonetheless eventually adapted itself and successfully applied tremendous military pressure on the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Furthermore, it did so in the wider context of a cohesive political strategy – even though the latter ultimately failed. The Indian armed forces also had to deal with the spill-over of the Sri Lankan conflict in the Maldives Islands – and did so decisively. It must be emphasized that at the time, these developments were widely perceived as the symptoms of India's rise into a full-fledged regional power.

Furthermore, while the IPKF was battling with the LTTE in Sri Lanka's Northern and Eastern provinces, another interlinked conflict literally tore apart the rest of the country. During the very same years, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (People's Liberation Front, JVP), defeated in 1971, made another bid to claim power, thus unleashing successive waves of violence that ultimately claimed the lives of an estimated 40,000 people and ended with the insurgent movement's virtual annihilation.

As is usually the case in works of this kind, this research is based on a wide range of sources, including scientific studies, official publications and first-hand testimonies. While the emphasis in these volumes is on military history, warfare never happens in a vacuum, but as a part of a wider context. For example, in the so-called 'small wars' of the early 21st century, military and political – in the wider sense – operations interact with each other all the time, making any attempt to completely isolate tactical operations virtually impossible. Therefore, descriptions of geo-political circumstances are added as necessary. However, these are kept to a minimum and used solely to explain the background to specific developments; the reader should be forewarned that this account is not an attempt to provide a 'full spectrum' history of the Sri Lankan civil wars, which would also have to cover in-depth sociological, economic and political aspects of the conflict.

In the meantime, the author has gone to great lengths in order to

'depoliticise' the narrative. This meant avoiding the use of terms such as 'regime', 'rebels', 'terror' or 'terrorist'. Clearly, one man's 'freedom fighter' is another's 'terrorist'. This book does not aim to judge the politics, but rather to concentrate on recording and describing the military history of Sri Lanka, and thus all efforts were made to maintain a non-partisan narrative that remains readable and easy to understand.

As always, such a project proved possible only because of significant help provided by a number of individuals. In particular, the author would like to thank Rohan Gunaratna for use of the pictures published in his 1987, 1994, 1997 and 2001 books, as listed in the bibliography, as well as Albert Grandolini for allowing the author to use his collection of pictures, and Laurent Touchard for providing additional sources of reference. Last but not least, thanks to Tom Cooper for sharing his advice and insight on innumerable occasions.

INTRODUCTION

By the early 1970s, the mainstream Tamil political parties – which were to coalesce into the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) a few years later – had proved unable to end the discriminatory measures targeting the Sri Lankan Tamil community. Accordingly, a new generation of young activists emerged, and these were determined to fight for an independent Tamil Eelam, and to use armed violence to reach their goal. It was in this fashion that small armed groups such as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO), the Eelam Revolutionary Organization (EROS), the People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) and the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) came into being. However, their actions remained limited to bank robberies – in order to fund themselves – and assassinations targeting local politicians, police officers and their informants, and each of these groups only had a few dozen full-time and hard-core militants.

This, however, changed radically in July 1983, when anti-Tamil pogroms – triggered by a highly successful LTTE ambush of an army patrol – erupted in Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka. While order was re-established after a few days by the security forces, the so-called 'Black July' proved a turning point in the conflict. The pogroms incensed public opinion in the neighbouring Indian state of Tamil Nadu, which compelled New Delhi to intervene in the conflict along a two-tracked policy. This consisted of providing arms and training to the militant groups while pressuring Colombo into finding a political settlement with the militants. Hence, the strength of the militant movement exploded from a few dozen to as many as several thousand between 1983 and 1985. Several new groups came into being, although the LTTE, TELO, EROS, PLOTE and EPRLF remained by far the most powerful, becoming known as the 'Big Five'. With the Sri Lankan armed forces initially utterly unprepared for such a conflict, the Tamil militants managed to seize control of the Jaffna Peninsula, where army units found themselves literally besieged in their garrisons, and to develop their clandestine infrastructures in the other Tamil-populated areas of the country. However, New Delhi also progressively lost control over the LTTE, militarily much more powerful than the other militant groups, as it found ways to finance itself autonomously and create its own shipping wing that enabled it to procure weapons and other supplies independently from its Indian benefactor. In 1986, the LTTE also cracked down on the other militant groups – in particular the TELO – and gained control of the Jaffna Peninsula.

By early 1987, the Sri Lanka Army (SLA), the Sri Lanka Air Force (SLAF) and to a lesser extent the Sri Lanka Navy (SLN) had considerably reinforced themselves, with equipment and new units but also better training and tactics. On 26 May 1987, the armed forces initiated Operation *Liberation*, their biggest ever military offensive, with three brigades, and seized in a matter of days the crucial Vadamarachchi area. On 3 June, the second phase of *Liberation* began with an advance from Palali toward Jaffna town.

Crucially, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) – the Indian equivalent of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) of the USA – came to the conclusion that the Sri Lankan armed forces were on the verge of inflicting decisive blows on the LTTE in the Jaffna Peninsula. In reaction to this, the RAW had swiftly increased the level of military support to the Tamil militant groups, although it assessed that this was unlikely to reverse the military balance between the warring parties. From New Delhi's perspective, allowing the most powerful Tamil militant group to be defeated was unthinkable.[1] Not only would this incense public opinion in Tamil Nadu, it would also deprive the Indian government of a crucial leverage tool against its Sri Lankan counterpart. On 4 June 1987, the Indians launched Operation *Poomalai* ('Garland'), consisting of a food airdrop by Indian Air Force (IAF) transport aircraft – escorted by fighter jets – over the Jaffna Peninsula. This, in turn, was the beginning of a major escalation of New Delhi's involvement in the conflict.

CHAPTER 1
UNFULFILLED HOPES

From mid-1987 onwards, New Delhi also increased pressure on the diplomatic front and intensified its negotiations with Colombo – which had been more or less ongoing for years – in order to get an agreement fulfilling India's main objectives. The following quote by High Commissioner Dixit, who was the chief Indian negotiator, offers an insight on the outlying tensions that characterised the talks between the two governments:

> I did not see any political will or desire on the part of [Sri Lanka's President] Jayewardene and his main advisers to discuss and resolve the ethnic problem in a straight-forward manner and in a spirit of compromise. The approach seems to be still one of gaining time

> and going ahead with military operations. Instead of rethinking the wisdom of assuming a direct role in the wake of such evidence of resistance, the Indian Government persisted in seeking to square the circle by doling out assurances to both parties.[1]

Nonetheless, Sri Lanka was virtually on its own in facing Indian diplomatic pressure. Unlike previously, the new round of negotiations between New Delhi and Colombo progressed at lightning speed; they began on 12 June 1987 and were concluded by the signing of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord on 29 July that year. The accord met virtually all of India's goals, as described in Volume 1 of this mini-series: Colombo was to forbid the presence of foreign military and intelligence personnel in the country and not grant use of its harbours and airports to any foreign power.[2]

On the other hand, the accord guaranteed the unity and sovereignty of Sri Lanka, while the Tamil-populated Eastern and Northern Provinces were to be merged and benefit from larger autonomy. New provincial authorities in the form of a provincial council and a Chief Minister were to be elected. The new united province was to be approved by the local population in a referendum to be held on 31 December 1988. In the meantime, the Tamil language was to be reinstated as one of the official national languages.

A ceasefire between the Tamil militants and government armed forces was to take place almost immediately, while the state of emergency was to be lifted on 15 August 1987. Furthermore, the Tamil militants were to surrender their weapons while the Sri Lankan government would disband the Home Guard and the army would withdraw from all the positions occupied since 15 May 1987. In the meantime, New Delhi would stop any further support to the Tamil militant groups, and the 130,000 Tamil refugees in India were to resettle in their homeland.[3]

Crucial Flaws

At first glance, the Indian diplomats had acted decisively and solved a so-far intractable conflict. This was, however, deceptive because the accord was flawed by the very conditions under which it was negotiated: namely, that the Tamil militant groups had not been included in the talks. It was only a week before the accord's signing that Indian officials submitted it to representatives of the EPRLF, TELO, PLOTE, EROS and TULF who had been brought to New Delhi. After meetings with Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, they finally endorsed it – although with reservations.[4]

Things proved more difficult with the LTTE. On 23 July, two IAF Mi-17 helicopters of 129 Helicopter Unit picked up Velupillai Prabhakaran and several other LTTE leaders in Jaffna. From there, they were transported to New Delhi via Madras and housed in the Ashok Hotel, where they were virtually secluded under heavy Indian protection. High Commissioner Dixit than presented them with the accord, which instantly triggered a heated exchange; the LTTE had much more to lose in the peace deal than the other Tamil movements. The Tigers were as committed as ever to an independent Tamil Eelam, and the accord fell far short of this ultimate goal. Furthermore, there was no guarantee that elections would allow the movement to keep the prominent position it had gained during the previous year, while the union of the Northern and Eastern provinces was temporary as it could be subsequently cancelled, thus "dismembering the Tamil Homeland".[5] Last but not least, the LTTE leader was fiercely opposed to any disarmament, as explained by Anton Balasingham who was acting as LTTE chief negotiator:

> The most important aspect that affected the LTTE was the issue on decommissioning. The Agreement stipulated that all Tamil militant organisations should be disarmed within 72 hours of the signing of the Accord. Prabhakaran's face turned red when I translated this particular clause … He resolved not to accept the Indo-Lanka Accord under any circumstances.[6]

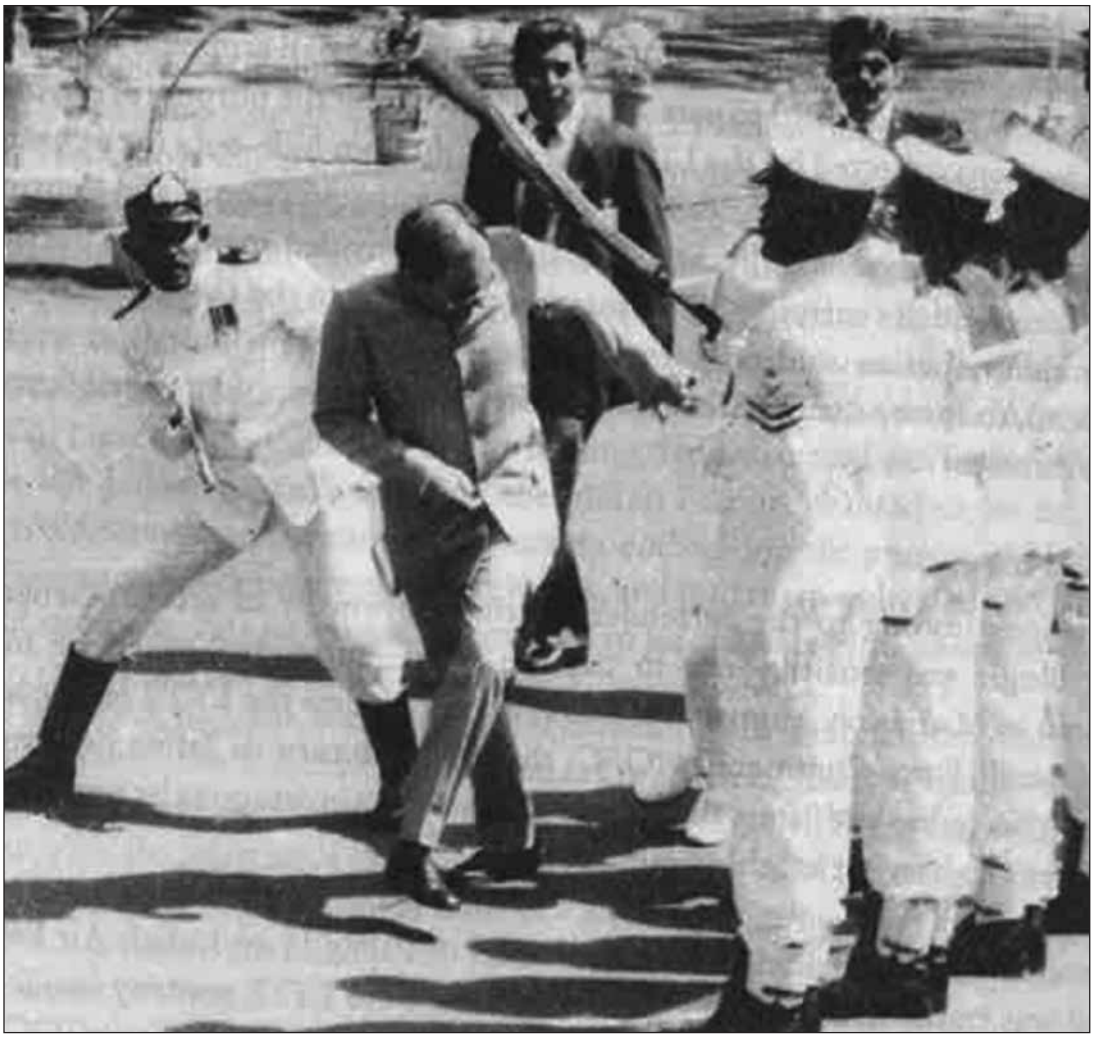
In the end, it took a meeting between Rajiv Gandhi and Velupillai Prabhakaran on 28 July to unlock the stalemate. The latter agreed to give the accord a chance and disarm, while the former promised that the bulk of the positions in the new provincial authorities would be assigned to the LTTE. Furthermore, Gandhi agreed to provide the movement with 5 million rupees a month during a six to eight month period to compensate for the taxes that it would no longer be able to raise among the Tamil populations in Sri Lanka.[7] Gandhi then left for Colombo the following day while the LTTE leaders were back in Jaffna on 2 August. These rushed negotiations and the unclear compromise that ended them were to have far-reaching consequences, as the LTTE

Rajiv Gandhi (left) and Junius Richard Jayewardene signing the 1987 Peace Accord on 29 July 1987. (Mark Lepko Collection)

leaders felt they had been strong-armed by the Indians. Indeed, it can be argued that they had been cornered because they could not outright refuse the accord; the Tamil population was eager for peace and it would have been a blunder for the Tigers to openly antagonise this feeling. It is striking that while staying in the Ashok Hotel, the LTTE leader stated to an Indian journalist that he remained sceptical about the accord, and that he was willing to fight Indian troops if the deal failed to guarantee Tamil rights.[8]

The accord was fiercely opposed by large sectors of Sinhalese opinion in Sri Lanka too, including Prime Minister Ranasinghe Premadasa and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP, the main opposition party at the time). It was also highly unpopular in the armed forces, as explained by Lieutenant General Cyril Ranatunga, head of JOSSOPS (Joint Services Special Operations) at the time:

> The 1987 Peace Accord was finally rammed down President Jayewardene's throat though there was the outward stance of 'agreement'. To his credit, I must say that he never liked it, but had no option. We in the military vehemently disagreed as we were on the verge of crushing terrorism for good.[9]



Shortly before leaving Colombo on 29 July 1987, Rajiv Gandhi narrowly evaded an assassination attempt by Vijithamuni Rohana de Silva, one of the Sri Lankan naval ratings standing in the honour guard. (Rohan Gunaratna Collection)

The announcement of the imminent signing of the accord also triggered a wave of riots in Colombo on 27 July. By the following day, 38 people had been killed, while between 28 July and 2 August, as many as 5,209 building were damaged and over 500 public buses destroyed or damaged. India had foreseen such contingencies: elements of the crack 1 Para Commando Battalion under Colonel Arjun Katoch had been aboard two IN (Indian Navy) frigates anchored off Colombo since early July and ready to rescue Indian diplomats if needed. Colonel Katoch and two of his men even reconnoitred Colombo disguised in SLN uniforms, while a clandestine communication centre was set up in a room of the Taj Samudra Hotel. In the case of a coup or uncontrollable riots, India had also planned to evacuate the Sri Lankan president directly from his residence by helicopter. It was in this tense climate that Rajiv Gandhi arrived in Colombo on 29 July, and met with demonstrations fiercely repressed by the Sri Lankan police. The Indian Prime Minister and President Junius Richard Jayewardene signed the accord during that afternoon, but only sheer luck avoided the visit turning into a tragedy. When leaving Sri Lanka, and while Gandhi inspected the customary honour guard, Vijithamuni Rohana de Silva, one of the naval ratings presenting arms, suddenly seized his rifle by the barrel to swing it, intending to land a killing blow on the Prime Minister's neck. Gandhi managed to move in time and the rifle's butt landed on his shoulders instead, leaving him bruised but safe. The naval rating was then immobilized and the Prime Minister boarded his aircraft on schedule and returned to India. Crucially, on 29 July, Rajiv Gandhi also called the Indian Chief of Army Staff and ordered the immediate deployment of the IPKF in Sri Lanka. Indeed, a clause of the Accord stipulated that:

> In the event that the Government of Sri Lanka requests the Government of India to afford military assistance to implement these proposals, the Government of India will cooperate by giving the Government of Sri Lanka such military assistance as and when requested.[10]

The force's movement had actually been decided even before the accord was signed. The LTTE had made it very clear that it would never surrender any weapon to Sri Lankan security forces. Furthermore, the country was in the middle of an economic crises, and Colombo could ill-afford to fund a large military presence in northern Sri Lanka while fighting a fast-growing threat in the south.[11]

The Indian Peace Keeping Force

Plans for an Indian Army deployment in Sri Lanka had been made since at least 1983, but never in detail, and for different scenarios, including an outright invasion with the support of Tamil militant groups. In that case, early planning included the engagement of no fewer than 24 Jaguar attack aircraft and six Canberra bombers, as well

as two Indian Navy submarines. The dispatch of an expeditionary force to help Sri Lankan security forces quell the Tamil insurgency was also envisioned. However, such contingencies remained just that, without dedicated staff work or detailed planning. In April 1987, the dispatch of a peacekeeping force began to be studied more closely, while in early June, the 54th Division – also known as the 'Bison' Division, and an element of the Indian Army's strategic reserve – was identified as the obvious candidate for such a deployment. The unit was not only based in Secunderabad in southern India, but had also progressively transformed into a dedicated air- or sea-deployable force.[12]

On 29 July, the IAF had readied at least 36 An-32s, five An-12s and three Il-76s. Indian Airline aircraft were also chartered to deploy troops to Chennai, where they boarded IAF transports. Early in the morning of 30 July, the IAF launched an air bridge from the airports of Dindigul, Begumpet and Tiruchirapally to Palali Air Base (AB) in the Jaffna Peninsula, thus initiating Operation *Pawan*. On their way back to India, most of the involved aircraft made a 'detour' to evacuate Sri Lankan troops from Jaffna to Colombo, where they refuelled – if necessary – and then flew back to India to repeat the entire cycle. At one stage, one transport aircraft was taking off every five or six minutes, while on 31 July alone, 34 transport planes landed at Palali AB. Meanwhile, other units moved to Madras and Vishakapatnam, where they boarded ships that carried them to the Sri Lankan ports of Kankensanthurai and Trincomalee. By 4 August, 54th Division and its three infantry brigades had completed its transfer to Sri Lanka. The divisional headquarters was split between Palali and Trincomalee. The 91st Infantry Brigade established its headquarters in Kankensanthurai and was responsible for the Jaffna Peninsula, while the 47th and 76th Infantry Brigades established their headquarters in Trincomalee and Batticaloa respectively, with corresponding areas of responsibility. The division also benefited immensely from the arrival at Palali AB of six Mi-17s from the IAF's 129 Helicopter Unit (HU). From 2 to 8 August, when they returned to India and were replaced by a detachment of Mi-8s from 109 Helicopter Unit, the six Mi-17s flew 82 sorties – a total of 155.35 hours' flight time – and carried 608 troops and 18 tons of supplies.

However, the initial deployment was anything but flawless, largely because the preparation phase had been rushed and adequate infrastructure was lacking in Sri Lanka. Only flat-bottom ships could dock at Kankesanthurai harbour, while the infrastructure at Palali AB was inadequate to support such intensive air operations. Several units in Jaffna thus had to wait for weeks before receiving their heavy equipment, which had to be unloaded in Trincomalee. Major V.K. Singh, CO of a company of the 25th Rajput Battalion, gave an example of the kind of – often tragi-comic – incidents that took place during the IPKF's induction, on this occasion while boarding an Indian Airline aircraft:

> My men came and told me that the entire first line and second line mortar ammunition had been loaded in the aircraft that I would be travelling in. "Good," I said. "Where?" "In the hold, under your feet," they proudly informed me. Mortar ammunition being fairly compact, though extremely heavy, had fitted neatly into the hold. The civil loaders had been contemptuously shooed off, and what had to be done had been done. There were forty-five men in my aircraft. I told them to fan out so it looked like we had a full load of troops, hoping to compensate for the extra weight of the ammunition. The pilot came on board and asked how many men were "manifested". Ninety-five, he was told. Then he did a head count and finished with over a hundred; then did another and came up short with a figure around forty. [After] two [or] three more attempts the crew gave up and announced that they would assume the strength of passengers was one hundred. They shut the doors and the aircraft took off into the night sky, heading for Chennai. As we approached Meenambakam airport, the pilots were struggling, the aircraft obviously being overloaded. Their flying skills were fully tested and they did a superb job putting the aircraft down smoothly on the runway. Once the unloading began, the curious crew came around to the hold to see what came out. Three truckloads of compact cases were taken out after which the senior pilot asked what was in the boxes. "Mortar bombs," he was told. "Live?" he asked tentatively. "Yes Sir, absolutely live," he was informed. The crew took a solemn oath never to fly [the] Indian Army again.[13]

Table 1: IPKF, early August 1987

Unit	CO	Comment
IPKF	Lieutenant General Depinder Singh	
54th Air Assault Division	Major General Harkirat Singh	HQ in Palali and Trincomalee
10th Para-Commando Battalion		Palali AB.
47th Infantry Brigade	Brigadier S.K. Dhawan	HQ Vavuniya
11th Battalion Madras Regiment (11 Madras)		
5th Battalion Maratha Light Infantry (5 Maratha LI)		
14th Battalion Sikh Light Infantry (14 Sikh LI)		
76th Infantry Brigade	Brigadier I.M. Dhar	HQ Batticaloa
2nd Battalion Maratha Light Infantry (2 Maratha LI)		
25th Battalion Rajput Regiment (25 Rajput)		
12th Battalion Garhwal Rifles (12 Garhwal Rifles)		
91st Infantry Brigade	Brigadier J.K. Ralli	HQ Kankensanthurai
5th Battalion Madras Regiment (5 Madras)		
1st Battalion Maratha Light Infantry (1 Maratha LI)		
8th Battalion Mahar Regiment (8 Mahar)		

However, 54th Division had very little available firepower, with only a single light artillery battery, a single tank troop and the 15th Mechanised Battalion, which arrived later. The organic divisional artillery brigade and tank regiment were left behind in India. Furthermore, no mobilisation order had been issued and all the units deployed were badly under-strength because they had not been requested to recall personnel on leave, following courses or assigned to other duties. This was especially important because the Indian Southern Command did not have major combat units permanently

assigned to it. On the contrary, the Indian Army was rotating forces operating in other, more demanding areas to Southern Command to provide them with 'rest and refit' periods. Accordingly, most of the division's infantry battalions had only between 350 and 400 men instead of their nominal strength of 800. To make matters worse, a number of 54th Air Assault Division's most experienced staff officers had been transferred to other units during the preceding months. Besides, although the 8th and 110th Engineer Regiments went to Sri Lanka with the rest of the division, the IPKF initially lacked basic items such as tents or even maps, and carried only very limited stocks of ammunition, while medical facilities and support were also minimal. In addition, the chain of command was highly complex: 54th Air Assault Division HQ answered to the IPKF HQ, under Lieutenant General Depinder Singh, who was also in charge of Southern Command. Furthermore, no joint command headquarters for Sri Lanka had been organised, thus complicating coordination between the Army, the IAF and the IN. Lack of coordination was also endemic higher up, with the RAW and External Affairs Ministry following their own policies.[14]

An Ilyushin Il-76 transport of the IAF on arrival at Palali AB in northern Sri Lanka. The first stage of the IPKF's deployment was characterised by a startlingly massive airlift effort that brought an entire brigade group to Sri Lanka in a matter of a few hours. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

A row of Antonov An-32 transports and one HAL HS.748 transport of the IAF, parked along a taxiway at Palali AB on 31 July 1987. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Although old and worn out by intensive service in the Himalayas, the An-12s of No. 25 Squadron, IAF, also took part in Operation *Pawan*. (Tom Cooper Collection)

Indeed, the whole IPKF deployment was made based on assumptions that would in the end prove false. When instructed to move into Sri Lanka, the CO of the 54th Air Assault Division received only sketchy orders – not much more than the text of the accord itself. Thus, the Indian troops were supposed only to receive weapons willingly surrendered by the Tamil militant groups and monitor the ceasefire. They also had to establish a network of camps neighbouring those the Sri Lankan security forces, help the bulk of the latter to withdraw from the Northern and Eastern provinces, and finally support both the Tamil and Sinhalese refugees return for repatriation. The IPKF would ultimately be responsible for law and order in the two provinces, and thus made the election of new local authorities possible. In essence, nothing more than muscled law enforcement operations or riot control were expected. The IPKF mandate was a classic peacekeeping mission, with the former belligerents supposed to cooperate willingly for its success.[15]

The Indian Army had earlier envisioned the deployment of a much more powerful force at the onset of Operation *Pawan*, including two infantry divisions, an independent infantry brigade and a full armoured brigade. However, by the end of July 1987, Indian intelligences agencies, essentially the RAW, had concluded that no armed opposition was to be expected from the Tamil militants. The LTTE's motivation in accepting the accord was understood to be as a result of its military weakness, as illustrated by the Tigers' inability to face Operation *Liberation* only three months before. RAW officials were also convinced that the LTTE would never turn against its

Another An-32, this time unloading at Palali, together with a HAL-manufactured HS.748 and two Mi-8 helicopters of the IAF. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

A view into the cargo hold of an Ilyushin Il-76 transport of the IAF during the loading process. With the giant Il-76s towering over the SLAF's aircraft on the tarmac of Palali AB, Sir Lanka's Prime Minister couldn't but conclude that this was one of the "consequences of living under the shadow of a very big and powerful neighbour". (Albert Grandolini Collection)

benefactor of many years, as expressed by Anand Verma, the then Secretary of RAW: "These are boys whom we know and with whom we have been in touch and so they will listen to us."[16]

RAW also underestimated the LTTE's military capabilities, acknowledging its ability to conduct urban guerrilla attacks but judging it unable to mount a protracted rural guerrilla war. Due to these wrong assessments, the general non-readiness of the IPKF to conduct combat operations if needed, and the improvisation with which it was deployed in Sri Lanka, Field Marshal S.H.F.J. Manekshaw – one of the most respected military figures in India – made the following, damning assessment about the beginning of Operation *Pawan*: "The induction of the IPKF into Sri Lanka was highly improper. It was inducted in a piecemeal manner and without a proper mandate."[17]

Elusive Peace

Everything nonetheless looked fine during the first weeks of the IPKF presence. On 2 August, TELO had surrendered a meagre stock of weapons, and was followed in kind by other movements such as PLOTE, EROS and EPRLF, which gave up small amounts of arms and ammunitions too, while Sri Lankan troops were successfully withdrawn from the Northern and Eastern provinces.[18] In all, Indian aircraft carried over 6,000 men to southern Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan military presence in the north was soon reduced to a handful of bases and camps held by skeleton garrisons. Similarly, the Police Special Task Force dismantled several of its camps in the Amparai and Batticaloa districts.

The Tamil population initially welcomed the Indian troops, offering them garlands during their first patrols. Civilians had grown tired of the years of war and India was often perceived as a benevolent big brother. On 12 August, the death of three IPKF men from the 8th Engineer Regiment, killed while clearing landmines, triggered a massive wave of sympathy among Jaffna's population.[19] Furthermore, most of the restrictions enforced on the population by the Sri Lankan authorities, such as the ban on fishing or various embargoes, were lifted, triggering an overnight increase in economic activity, while the IPKF also reopened the railway connecting Vavuniya and Jaffna.[20]

The LTTE also seemed willing enough to apply the accord. On 4 August, Velupillai Prabhakaran made a convoluted speech in front of an estimated 50,000 people in Jaffna where he announced that despite all of his reservations about the accord, the Tigers would surrender weapons and become part of the peace process. On 5 August, the Tigers did indeed take part in a ceremony in Palali, during which they surrendered two small truckloads of weapons, consisting of a collection of G3, AK or Lee Enfield rifles, a few RPG-7s and machine guns, including at least one of their few Browning .50cal heavy machine guns, and several home-made mortars and bombs. The Tigers

claimed that the 488 weapons surrendered represented 85% of their armouries. That this was far from the case was obvious for everyone, as they were known to possess large numbers of M16 rifles and there were none of these in the two truckloads carried to Palali. Publicly, the Indians acknowledged the fiction that the LTTE had given away a major part of its weaponry. However, the Tigers had carefully hidden the bulk of their weapons, burying them in caches dispersed in the countryside or even in lagoons. Although, several other small-scale similar events took place in the Eastern Province, all of these were equally symbolic in nature.

This did not prevent the LTTE militants from maintaining relatively cordial or even friendly relations with the IPKF. On several occasions, Indian officers were invited to LTTE cadres' wedding ceremonies and there were even reports of Indian jeeps carrying LTTE flags. In eastern Sri Lanka, the Sinhalese population made complaints about IPKF soldiers, accusing them of favouring the Tamil people. Indeed, a number of Indian officers did not hide their sympathies for the Tigers – mostly because of their discipline.[21]

Indian troops on arrival in Sri Lanka. (Rohan Gunaratna Collection)

A Mi-17 from No. 129 Helicopter Unit about to embark a patrol of IPKF troops. The six helicopters of this unit saw heavy utilisation, although remaining in Sri Lanka for just a week. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Raising Tensions

However, the LTTE leadership soon found itself confronted with several problems, foremost that it felt it was losing control over the Tamil population. This meant that there was no guarantee that the movement would emerge victorious in future elections. In that regard, the IPKF's popularity was not the only problem. With the ceasefire, the rival Tamil movements became free to open political offices in places from where the Tigers had previously expelled them. The EPRLF became particularly active in the east and successfully attracted large numbers of people to its public meetings. Unsurprisingly, the conflict between militant groups turned deadly again before long.[22]

In mid-August, the EPRLF accused the LTTE of having abducted 13 of its militants and, arguing that it needed its arsenal to protect itself against such incidents, announced that it was suspending any further surrender of weapons to the IPKF. On 24 August, in Mannar, the LTTE killed one PLOTE militant, and the latter movement replied in kind by assassinating three Tigers in the same area and a fourth near Mullaitivu. On 1 September, another LTTE militant was abducted in Kokkuvil by an unknown group but was subsequently released. Unsurprisingly, the LTTE retaliated; on 6 September, a team of Tigers attacked a PLOTE training camp near Vavuniya and killed eight militants. The TELO became active too and reportedly ambushed an IPKF jeep carrying LTTE passengers, killing one of them.

In early September, the Tigers reinforced their militants active in Batticaloa with around 100 experienced fighters under Reagan and Karuna – two rising stars in the movement's armed wing. During the night of 13 September, they unleashed one of their trademark well-coordinated crackdowns against their rivals. They simultaneously raided around 20 sites used by either the EPRLF, PLOTE or the ENDLF, killing 70 or so of their militants, the bulk of them being EPRLF members.

Because of these bouts of fighting, virtually all the militant movements had ceased to surrender weapons by the end of August. Worse still, the IPKF was receiving intelligence indicating that the LTTE was busy carrying weapons stockpiled in Tamil Nadu to Sri Lanka. The Tigers also accused the RAW of covertly providing weapons to the EPRLF, PLOTE and TELO, in an attempt to undermine LTTE supremacy. On the other hand, the other groups accused the IPKF of favouring the LTTE.[23]

Thus, the LTTE was increasingly contested on both the political and military fronts, and its leadership reacted by turning against

In early August 1987, the IAF deployed a detachment of Mi-8s from No. 109 Helicopter Unit to replace No. 129 HU's Mi-17s. Mi-8s remained much longer on the Island and thus saw even more action. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Sinhalese refugees in the east. He also called for, among other things, the evacuation of all Sri Lankan security forces from the Northern Province and large parts of the Eastern Province.

Dhileepan's fast was the rallying point for large-scale LTTE-organised demonstrations against the IPKF. On several occasions, stones were launched against Indian troops. The latter did not fall into the trap laid by the Tigers, avoiding reacting brutally, although one civilian was killed during a demonstration at the gates of an IPKF camp in Mannar. Dhileepan continued his fast, not even drinking water, and died on 26 September.

The increased LTTE pressure bore its fruits; after a new round of negotiations, the Indians agreed to allocate the Tigers seven out of 12 seats in the

Velupillai Prabhakaran during his speech in Jaffna, in the presence of about 50,000 people, on 4 August 1987. (Adrien Fontanellaz Collection)

Indian Army troops manning a checkpoint early during their intervention in Sri Lanka. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Early on during Operation *Pawan*, not only were relations between the IPKF and the LTTE good, but the local population welcomed the Indian troops because they lessened the pressure exercised by insurgents and government authorities. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

the IPKF and launching a campaign to undermine its legitimacy. On 15 September, 25-year-old Amirthalingam Dhileepan, one of the LTTE's main political leaders, began a public fast until death in the Kandaswamy Temple in Nallur to protest against the return of interim government that was to lead the united Northern and Eastern provinces until elections. However, this failed to reduce tensions. The LTTE and President Jayewardene soon engaged in bickering about the identity of the Tigers' representatives in the new council – with the Indian diplomats caught in the middle and trying to mediate between the two uncompromising parties. The IPKF continued to be targeted as well; on 2 October, in Trincomalee, gunmen from an unknown militant group opened fire from a white van on Indian soldiers on guard duty near the Town Hall. Sepoy Gorakh Ram of the 26th Punjab was killed and another soldier wounded. The same day, a further incident triggered a chain of events that led to outright war between the IPKF and the LTTE.[24]

The Boat Tragedy

That night, the Sri Lanka Navy FAC (fast attack craft) hull number P-457 under Lieutenant Commander W.D. Ariyadasa sighted another

Lieutenant Colonel' Amirthalingam Dhileepan (also spelt Thileepan, centre, with glasses), one of the LTTE's primary political leaders, began a public fast until death in September 1987, in protest against the presence of Sri Lankan security forces and the IPKF. (Adrien Fontanellaz Collection)

Dhileepan with Prabhakaran in September 1987. (Adrien Fontanellaz Collection)

boat painted in grey off Point Pedro. The Dvora-class vessel stopped the unknown ship after a few warning shots, and was soon reinforced by the command and surveillance ship SLNS *Abeetha*, under Commander D.K. Dassanayake. The Sri Lankan sailors soon realised that they had caught a large prize – they captured 17 LTTE militants, a small stock of weapons, and VHF and UHF radio sets. Most of the prisoners were high-ranking cadres of the organization, including two area commanders, Pulandran and Kumarappa.

The captives were taken to Palali AB, locked into one of the terminal buildings, and kept under guard by Sri Lankan personnel. The

Prabhakaran with his militants in Tamil Nadu in the mid-1980s: supplies from the Indian Federal State of Tamil Nadu continued reaching the LTTE all through the presence of the IPKF in Sri Lanka. (Adrien Fontanellaz Collection)

LTTE immediately demanded their release, while the Indians asked Colombo to place them under IPKF custody. However, this was out of the question for Colombo: both Pulandran and Kumarappa were renowned for their leading of deadly operations against security forces and civilians a few months before. A SLAF aircraft was dispatched to Palali with orders to take the prisoners back to Colombo to face trial. An awkward and very tense situation developed at the airport. Two Sri Lanka Army platoons guarded the prisoners, but were in turn surrounded by Indian troops, including a mechanised company and 10 Para Commando Battalion, which were there to prevent the Sri Lankans taking the 17 captives to Colombo. The prisoners were, however, allowed to receive visits. As a result, Mahattaya, the LTTE second-in-command, and Anton Balasingham, the LTTE chief negotiator, used the opportunity to smuggle in cyanide pills hidden in food plates during a visit.

After two days of this uneasy standoff, tragedy struck on 5 October. The CO of 54th Air Assault Division was ordered to let the Sri Lankans do as they wished with their captives, and as soon as they understood that they were to be taken to Colombo, the 17 Tigers swallowed their cyanide pills. The Indians, having foreseen such an eventuality, had positioned a medical team nearby. However, the doctors managed to save the lives of only five out of the 17 militants.[25]

Rasaiah Parthipan - Lt. Col. Thileepan
Rasaiah Parthipan also known as Lt. Col. Thileepan was a LTTE political wing member who died during a hunger strike during the IPKF operation of Jaffna, Sri Lanka. Rasaiah Parthipan joined the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in 1983 prior to Black July pogrom. He was given the name Thileepan. He became the LTTE political wing leader of the Jaffna peninsula. He was a determined person making him fast till death.
Reasons for fast
On the 15th of September 1987 at 9.30 a.m at the Nallur Murugan Temple, Thileepan began his fast. His main objective was to bring awareness and action to a list of public demands made by himself and the Tamil Tigers, at a time when the relationship between the LTTE and the IPKF administration was deteriorating.
The publicly stated goals of his fast were
BRITAIN SAFED GANDHI IN 1947 ...
INDIA KILLED THILEEPAN IN 1987 ...
Lt. Col. Thileepan [LTTE political wing leader] 27.11.1960 - 26.09.1987
*All Tamils detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act should be released.
* The colonisation of Sinhalese in Tamil areas under the guise of rehabilitation should be stopped.
* All such rehabilitation should be stopped until an interim government is formed.
* The Sri Lankan government should stop opening new Police stations and camps in the Northeastern province.
* The Sri Lankan Army and Police should withdraw from schools in Tamil villages and the weapons given by the Sri Lankan government to 'homeguards' should be withdrawn under the supervision of the Indian army.

The LTTE's official announcement of Dhileepan's death through hunger strike. (Adrien Fontanellaz Collection)

DPSA, TASA, HETAC and METAC: the Indian Air Force of the late 1980s

The Mirage 2000H was the most advanced interceptor and multi-role fighter-bomber of the Indian Air Force in 1987. This example from No. 7 Squadron – the unit that flew top cover for the An-32s that air-dropped food supplies over Jaffna on 3 June 1986 – is armed with training rounds of the Matra Super 530F and Matra R.550 Magic Mk.I air-to-air missiles. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

The 1980s was a decade of massive expansion and modernisation for the Indian Air Force: following – the often prolonged, and repeatedly postponed – evaluation of dozens of different aircraft types, the IAF quickly concluded several of its programmes by placing a number of major orders. Even as of 2019, the majority of the aircraft operated by the IAF were acquired in the 1980s.

Intending to replace its obsolete and slow English Electric Canberra medium bombers, the IAF opened the search for a deep-penetration strike aircraft (DPSA) in the mid-1970s. Following six years of evaluations and negotiations, it selected an extensively modified version of the Franco-British SEPECAT Jaguar fighter-bomber. The first 18 were acquired from the stocks of the Royal Air Force in 1980, with 40 built at Warton in Great Britain and 120 manufactured under licence by Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL), under the local name Shamsher.

At the same time, the IAF also ran a project for a tactical air support aircraft (TASA), less demanding in terms of range, but requiring accurate weapon delivery and supersonic capability at low altitude. The choice fell on the Soviet-made Mikoyan i Gurevich MiG-23BN, 95 of which were imported, starting in 1980, to serve with four squadrons under the designation Vijay. The acquisition of MiG-23BNs was followed by licence manufacture of 165 MiG-27Ms by HAL, starting in 1985, under the local designation Bahadur.

The selection of new interceptors proved slightly more complex and progressed only once Washington granted permission for the export of General Dynamics F-16 fighter-bombers to Pakistan in 1982–83. New Delhi reacted by purchasing MiG-23MFs from the former USSR, but these proved no match in regards of technology and capability. Following brief negotiations, 40 Dassault Mirage 2000H interceptors were acquired from France: deliveries began two years later and the type entered service with two squadrons under the local designation Vajra. Discomfited, Moscow reacted by

CHAPTER 2
JVP RESURRECTION

One of the factors that weighed heavily in President Jayewardene's decision to bow to Indian pressure and sign the accord was the resurgence of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna. The leftist movement had been largely dispersed in the aftermath of the 1971 insurrection, while the bulk of its leadership, beginning with its leader, Rohana Wijeweera, had been caught and condemned to long jail sentences. A number of militants and almost all the leadership grew disillusioned and simply quit the party. Others avoided capture, remained in the JVP clandestinely and created several small splinter groups. By the mid-1970s, the JVP was thus nearly extinct, although Wijeweera still attempted to reorganise it from his jail cell – with some success. In early 1977, a Parliamentary procedural flaw triggered the lifting of the ban targeting the JVP, and the movement initiated limited public protests for the release of its leader.[1]

The Sri Lankan political scene shifted in July 1977 when the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, under Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike, lost the General Election to the United National Party (UNP), which constituted its own government under its leader, Jayewardene. A few months later, Jayewardene approved the release of captive JVP militants, including Wijeweera, who was freed on 2 November 1977. The government's official intent was reconciliation and to avoid turning the JVP leader into a martyr, as explained by Jayewardene himself: "If I did not release him, he would have become like Nelson Mandela. There was a feeling growing among our people, and I could not have resisted it."[2]

Letting the JVP figurehead free and allowing his party to enter into

Considered an 'anti-armour' asset, the Mi-25 attack helicopters of No. 125 Helicopter Unit saw intensive operations while deployed in Sri Lanka. This example is parked outside one of the forward bases of the IPKF contingent. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

offering MiG-29s: in 1985, a contract for 45 was signed, deliveries of which began in 1987. The type entered service with two squadrons under the local designation Baaz.

The ageing fleet of Antonov An-12 transports was kept in service with two squadrons because of the requirement to supply troops deployed high in the Himalayas along the borders with Pakistan and China. However, when the An-12s began showing their age, the IAF was quick in studying the requirement for a necessary replacement of the heavy transport aircraft (HETAC). This resulted in an order for 24 much bigger and jet-powered Ilyushin Il-76MDs from the USSR. In service with two squadrons under the local designation Gajraj since mid-1985, Il-76s played a crucial role during the quick deployment of the IPKF to Sri Lanka. The selection process for a new medium tactical transport aircraft (METAC) that resulted in the acquisition of 95 An-32s lasted no less than 14 years, because this type – locally designated Sutlej – replaced three types in service with five operational squadrons and the Paratroop Training School, starting in 1984.

Only the helicopter fleet of the IAF experienced a less dramatic growth during the 1980s – probably because this was already huge. The Aerospatiale SA.315 Lama and Aerospatiale SE.316B/C Alouette III had been in production at HAL under the designation Cheetah and Chetak, respectively, since 1965. Over 400 were delivered to the IAF, the Army, Navy and Coast Guard by 1987, when the air force was ordered to hand out all of its Chetaks to the ground and naval services. Thus, by the time of the Indian intervention in Sri Lanka, the IAF had 10 squadrons operating Mil Mi-8s (Rana) and its upgraded derivative, the Mi-17 (Pratap), in the assault and transport role, 150 Cheetahs for liaison and transport purposes, and one squadron operating Mi-25 attack helicopters. The last four types were to see the most combat action in support of the IPKF.

electoral politics had another benefit, as it would unavoidably be in competition with the SLFP, the UNP's arch-rival, by tapping into the same rural electoral pool. For that reason, the UNP did, for a time, provide some limited support to the left-wing party.[3]

Into the Light

The JVP reorganised itself as a conventional political party – although it allegedly kept a clandestine core – and prepared to contest the next elections, breaking from its insurrectional past and rallying mainstream politics. The revolution was thus no longer to come from the barrel of a gun, but from the ballot box. With high youth unemployment and a society as unequal as it had been a decade earlier, the JVP easily recruited new and dedicated militants, not only making up for those it had lost during the 1970s, but expanding further. The party thus established a presence in most of southern and central Sri Lanka, creating a large number of offices. Political indoctrination camps continued to be held to train new members, although the movement also suffered from numerous defections,

Rohana Wijeweera holding a press-conference in 1969. (Rohan Gunaratna Collection)

Wijeweera with his family in the early 1980s. (Rohan Gunaratna Collection)

Wijeweera holding a speech during a JVP meeting in the early 1980s. (Rohan Gunaratna Collection)

mainly because of the authoritarian nature of Wijeweera's leadership. The party also reinitiated some limited connections abroad, noticeably when its leader travelled to Cuba and Iraq, and when it opened a political bureau in London. Some limited cooperation began with the Iraqi Baath Party, which gifted the movement a few vehicles and printing equipment, while in return at least one protest was organised in front of the Iranian embassy in Colombo to denounce what was labelled Tehran's "aggression" against Iraq in the war between the two countries. Crucially, the JVP also established links with the Basque nationalist insurgent group Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (Basque Homeland and Liberty, ETA).

While the JVP excelled in mobilising its militants to hold a large number of meetings and rallies, thus giving an impression of strength, its results in the ballots proved in the end rather limited. During the June 1981 District Development Councils elections, the movement achieved between 5% and 13% of the votes in the districts and 13 JVP candidates were elected to the councils. Things did not improve for the 20 October 1982 Presidential Election, when it presented Wijeweera as its candidate: 52.91% of the votes went to Jayewardene and 39.07% to the SLFP candidate, with Wijeweera trailing in third with 4.19% (273,439 votes). Obviously, the movement was far from replacing the SLFP as the main Leftist force, and a number of disappointed militants resigned from the party as a result. The only good news was that the JVP emerged as the major player among the far-left parties, as the Trotskyist Lanka Sama Samaja Party and Nava Sama Samaja Pakshaya Party candidates fared even worse, with 0.88% and 0.26% respectively.

The UNP government also began to have second thoughts about the JVP, noticeably when its 1983 First of May parade in Colombo included militants marching in uniforms. The JVP fiercely opposed a government-initiated referendum that ended in the reconduction of Parliament as it was – with an UNP majority – for another six years without new elections. The movement had never ceased to remain highly suspicious to the security services; from 1981 on, a number of its militants suffered frequent police harassment. On one occasion in 1982, police officers not only refused to provide security for one of its meetings, but also dispersed it by firing into the air. In the aftermath of the July 1983 anti-Tamil pogroms, the government accused the JVP, the NSSP and the Communist Party of having been responsible for the riots and proscribed them – allegedly in an attempt to use them as scapegoats, as their involvement in 'Black July' was never demonstrated. In the case of the JVP, the proscription was widely assessed as an attempt to neutralise a possible future political threat.[4]

The 31 July 1983 proscription did not come as a total surprise for the JVP, which had foreseen such an eventuality and planned accordingly. Hence, most of the leaders instantly went underground and found shelters in a network of safe houses. This proved a wise precaution. During the following months, the police cracked down on the party and managed to arrest 13 cadres, although only one politburo member, Lionel Bopage, was among them. However, the party legal infrastructure had been shattered, while a number of militants or sympathisers defected, and it took a year to completely rebuild a clandestine infrastructure. While the police operations targeting the movement continued thereafter, they were nowhere near enough to prevent it from rebuilding itself, thus establishing a wide array of underground cells and front organisations throughout the country.[5] This was especially the case in the rural communities and in the south, its traditional powerbases. The many police brutalities committed against suspected sympathisers only helped to turn the latter into die-hard militants. As before, recruitment targeted the countless unemployed youths antagonised by the deepening economic inequalities. The JVP also excelled in building political support in areas mostly inhabited with low-caste people, while recruitment was made even easier by a major shift in the movement's core ideology.[6]

Ideological Shift

Being a Marxist-Leninist movement, the JVP always saw the Sri Lankan situation largely through the lens of an economic class struggle, and thus in terms of overthrowing the '3,226 families' oligarchy which, in its view, controlled the country and exploited the peasants and working classes; that is, the immense majority of the population – Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim. The JVP stance in relation to the minorities issue was that all languages in use nationwide, as well as all religions, should have equal status. In 1983, however, the JVP also condemned the Tamil militant group's actions as unnecessarily dividing the Sri Lankan working class and thus playing right into the hands of both Tamil and Singhalese oligarchs, and, importantly, being proxies for "Indian imperialism". By the mid-1980s, the JVP thus characterised the LTTE as "fascist".

Denouncing perceived attempts by India to seize control of Sri Lanka became one of the pillars of JVP ideology. This paid handsome dividends at the end of July 1987, when President Jayewardene stunned the country by signing the accord, thus allowing the JVP to denounce him and the government as "Indian puppets", and offering

itself as a patriotic force fighting for the country's sovereignty, thus tapping into a much larger political audience. While the movement's prominent intellectuals always presented their stance in quite sophisticated arguments, these could also be declaimed in much more brutal fashion, with the use of slogans such as "Chase the Monkey's Army out", with 'Monkeys' being used to describe Indian soldiers, in reference to the Ramayana epic of old.[7] This caused the JVP to be widely described as a fanatical Sinhalese supremacist movement. The JVP leveraged its new nationalist stance by following a classic Leninist strategy. Thus, it created a front totally under its control but destined to attract larger support, the Deshapremi Janatha Viyaparaya (People's Patriotic Movement, DJV), as explained by a JVP militant active in the mid-1980s:

A rare photo of the JVP parade held on 1 May 1983. (Rohan Gunaratna Collection)

Even monks who sided with the JVP participated in the same parade. (Rohan Gunaratna Collection)

> The party adopted a strategy to achieve socialism by using the patriotic movement. That was the line. The line was patriotism. But the goal, the objective, was socialism. It has happened in Vietnam; it has happened in Cuba; it has happened in North Korea; it has happened in China. In each occasion we saw there was an enemy outside and the national bourgeoisie connected with that and the armed revolution occurred fighting against the state and the invader. JVP is the party, the DJV is the mass movement, and all the members of the DJV are not members of the JVP, but all JVP members are a part of the DJV … it is the military wing, but military wing means it is a mass movement. In that mass movement there are military groups – for districts and student union, student sector, there are different armed groups – but that is the mass movement. Most of the patriots, some nationalist, they join the DJV. But the DJV is not a formal organisation [with] filling in forms or something like that to get membership, it's not that kind of organisation.[8]

In the end, the JVP and the DJV were in essence one and the same, and the latter did not have any specific or separate organisation. From May 1987 on, all violent actions committed by the movement were claimed under the DJV name – or more specifically, its armed wing, the Deshapremi Sannaddha Balakaya (People's Patriotic Armed Troops, PPT). The DJV-PPT fiction thus allowed the JVP to deny any responsibility for the atrocities it was committing, although few were convinced by the argument; the DJV was universally considered as the JVP's armed wing.[9]

To make things even more complicated, the JVP also went to great lengths to create a wide array of other front organisations, including several small trade unions. Perhaps the most crucial among these was the Socialist Students Union (SSU), which was in effect the movement's student wing. Indeed, the SSU was the pool from which

most of the JVP cadres were drawn. Furthermore, the SSU was used as a vehicle to take control of the universities' student committees. Such 'university politics' could be extremely violent too; the first widely acknowledged JVP assassination during that period came on 15 December 1986, when hitmen hired by the JVP killed Daya Pathirana, the leader of the Independent Students Union – the SSU's arch-rivals. This murder triggered an escalation of the conflict between the two student movements, until the SSU, backed by the JVP armed wing, gained the upper hand. In 1989, the student wing even ended up with its own distinct armed unit, the Nimal Balasuriya Balakaya. This mixture of ideological shift and structural expansion allowed the JVP/DJV to grow tremendously between 1986 and 1988, by when it was assessed to have between 10,000 and 15,000 full-time militants[10].

Anatomy of an Insurgency

The JVP was highly structured. All promotions and nominations were decided from the top, with crucial decisions taken by a small number of high-ranking cadres. The supreme organ was the 13-member politburo, chaired by Rohana Wijeweera with Don Upatissa Gamanayake as General Secretary since 1984. The latter was a highly efficient organiser and proved instrumental in restructuring the movement after its clandestine return. Next came the Central Committee, with between 20 and 30 members. The movement was then divided in three main departments.

The first department controlled five zones, which covered the country and included several districts each. In turn, the districts were responsible for between two and four divisions, which included several sectors. All these received coded designations. To take only one example, the sectors K33, K66 and K99 formed D1 (Division 1), and Divisions D1, D2, D3 and D4 were under the Kandy district. All the districts had a district leader – usually a member of the Central Committee – who chaired a district committee. The divisions had a divisional secretary, heading a divisional committee including secretaries responsible for education, finance, propaganda and the local branches of the several fronts and wings, such as the SSU.

The second department included committees controlling the education, finance, military and propaganda wings, which in turn were present all through the JVP structure. For its propaganda, the movement operated a clandestine radio, known as *Ranahanda* (Battle Cry), and published – under its different names – a wide array of pamphlets and magazines, such as *Vedihanda* (The Sound of Gun Fire) and *Aragalaya* (Conflict). Last but not least, the third department controlled the movement's front organisations or wings dedicated to women, Bhikkus (monks) or the youth.

This structure was in essence very similar to other Leftist revolutionary movements and thus designed to allow a small core of dedicated cadres to control a complex organisation in a hostile environment. The movement's tentacles eventually covered large parts of the country, with cells active in a number of villages and most of the towns of central and southern Sri Lanka, to the point that it began to be known as the "little government" or the "night government".[11]

The whole movement was heavily compartmentalised to ensure its survivability, and a captured militant was thus unable to give away the names of more than a small number of other activists. Furthermore, they always operated under aliases – sometimes with more than five different aliases for a single individual – and were instructed to never give their real name and address to other militants. This went so far that even some Central Committee members were unknown to the others. If it could be avoided, the leaders were never active in their area of origin, making them even more difficult to identify, while militants were often relocated from one area to another. The sum of these security procedures made the movement extremely resilient and virtually impossible to dismantle without taking out the bulk of its top leadership.

The higher tier of the leadership remained more vulnerable because some specific individuals could accumulate several positions; at one point, a single cadre was simultaneously political secretary of the Western Zone, district leader of Colombo and all the while leading the students', Bhikkus and women's wings. Obviously, the arrest and interrogation by security forces of such an individual could be devastating.[12] However, cells or lower and middle-level leaders were simply replaced as fast as they were caught by the security forces[13].

Building an Armed Wing

The People's Patriotic Armed Troops, better known as the DJV, were a crucial asset for the movement.[14] The creation of the military wing began in 1984 under the overall supervision of politburo member Saman Piyasiri Fernando, who led it until his death at the end of 1989. Largely self-taught by reading revolutionary and military history literature, Fernando proved himself an extremely gifted organiser. By 1988, the armed wing was responding directly to the politburo and its subunits were present in virtually all of the JVP's structure. Notably, it had a representative in all the later Zonal and District Committees. The military district commander was in charge of a balakaya (troop) named after a national hero or a JVP martyr.[15] For instance, the Kamalabandu balakaya, covering the Galle district, was named after a JVP leader killed in 1971, while the Keppettipola balakaya, covering the Kandy district, was named after one of the leaders of the 1818 revolt against the British. Furthermore, at least the SSU and the Bikkhu wings had at some point their own balakayas.

However, these units should not be understood as anything like conventional military units. They controlled various numbers of small cells composed of full-time militants. They were mainly used as hit squads, operating most of the time in tiny numbers. All through its short history, the DJV launched only a few platoon-sized attacks, with rarely more than 50 armed militants engaged in a single operation. This armed structure was not completely separated from the other wings. If needed, it could also mobilise militants from other branches, while the armed cells' fighters were also selected from among the former's members. The DJV kept the compartmentalised structure of the JVP as a whole to ensure its survival – but was even tighter.

Table 2: Known DJV People's Patriotic Armed Troops units 1987-1989[16]

Unit[a]	Comment
Kamalabandu balakaya	Galle district
Keppettipola balakaya	Kandy district
Susik Wickrama balakaya	Matara district
Nimal Karunatilaka balakaya	Kurunegala district
Karunaratne balakaya	Kalutara district
Gunasena Warnapatabendi balakaya	Hambantota district
Padmasara balakaya	Anuradhapura district
Wimalaratne balakaya	Trincomalee district
Munidasa balakaya	Matale district
Ranjith Parakrama balakaya	Colombo district
Kudahapola balakaya	attached to the Bikhu Front
Nimal Balasuriya balakaya	attached to the SSU

Bottlenecks

Until 1987, when it began to expand massively, the armed wing could train only a limited number of militants – at best in batches of 30–40 and only for a week at most – in a few small camps. Furthermore, their training was almost exclusively theoretical in nature because of the lack of weapons. This meant that there were only limited numbers of thoroughly indoctrinated fighters with at least some military training before the 1987 and 1988 expansion – when at least one camp was known to have trained 140 militants in a single session. In the meantime, a vexing problem proved to be the movement's isolation, which complicated immensely the acquisition of the necessary know-how. The DJV allegedly even had to turn toward the criminal underground to hire or recruit hardened killers to conduct its first assassinations. A more satisfying solution was found by attracting a few army deserters, who were used as instructors in the training camps. The armed wing went a step further by deliberately infiltrating the armed forces with their own militants to gain the necessary knowledge before deserting, while creating specific cells dedicated to the recruitment of military personnel. As between 1984 and June 1987 there were only 150 desertions from the armed forces, this source of well-trained men was initially limited, but the JVP/DJV infiltration policy later paid handsome dividends, as desertions increased significantly thereafter with several hundred in a few months. While these were not all related to JVP militancy, a number of former soldiers nonetheless rallied to the movement. Furthermore, a number of successful DJV operations could be launched only because the militants benefited from complicity among the armed forces, which in turn had to demote sometimes dozens of suspected servicemen.[17]

Unsurprisingly, and because of its isolation, the movement also faced immense problems procuring military-grade weapons. A handful of these were obtained thanks to the infiltrated elements in the armed forces, either when they returned to the movement with their service weapons or when they stole a few of them from armouries, but this in essence remained a trickle. Another source proved to be the black market. It was not uncommon for soldiers deployed in northern Sri Lanka to keep weapons captured from Tamil militant groups or ammunition declared as expended in action, before selling them to the Colombo underground at the earliest opportunity. The local black market was not lacking for customers, as, aside of political violence, criminality was also exploding during the first half of 1987: a staggering 1,607 murders unrelated to political motives were recorded by the police during this time.[18] The clandestine weapons market was also fed by small-scale traffic with Lebanon, with Sri Lankan expatriate workers being used to smuggle weapons back to their home country. However, all of this was nowhere near enough to provide the necessary source of supply for an armed movement such as the JVP/DJV. The primary purpose of all major actions initiated by the insurgents against the security forces was thus to capture weapons, but despite some resounding successes, their results were in the end rather limited.

Hence, the bulk of the insurgents' weapons came from other sources. From early 1987, small teams began to confiscate privately held arms in the movements' areas of influence, securing much larger numbers of shotguns and other hunting weapons. There were also a number of small illegal workshops in the country producing the so-called 'Galkatas'. These were mostly crude hybrid single-shot firearms halfway between a pistol and a sawn-off shotgun, firing shotgun cartridges. Of course, such Galkatas could be used only at very short ranges. Shotguns and Galkatas comprised the bulk of the estimated 3,000 firearms held by the movement at the peak of its power in early 1989. Explosives were obtained by stealing from companies engaged in large development projects, while the bulk of the movement's radio equipment was acquired in similar fashion. Explosives were particularly used to build home-made grenades, with small plastic containers stuffed with dynamite and small pieces of metal. The fuse device was made from penlight batteries. In 1988 the insurgents also acquired the knowledge to develop their own hand-made landmines.[19]

On the other hand, the movement had no difficulties in building a vast network of safe houses, hideouts and caches to stock its limited arsenal. The Bikkhu wing in particular proved extremely important in this regard, making it possible for the militants to secure caches in temples – relatively immune from security force investigations. Yet the DJV was never able to establish large sanctuaries in remote areas sheltered from police or army forays – despite the availability of numerous jungle areas.

This inability to obtain equipment, along with the lack of safe rear-bases made it impossible for the DJV to conduct the kind of operations routinely initiated by movements such as the LTTE or TELO in previous years. But the arms they had were enough for the kind of actions the insurgents had in mind: large-scale campaigns of assassination to silence opponents and coerce large sectors of the population into following JVP directives, notably during the numerous strikes it initiated. In turn, this was expected to create an unbearable pressure on the government, which was supposed to crumble on its own, thus creating the conditions for a JVP takeover. In this context, it was unnecessary to engage the armed forces head-on; on the contrary, JVP strategists assessed the army as part of the solution, expecting that large numbers of troops would mutiny[20].

All-Out Insurgency

During the first half of 1987, the DJV accelerated recruitment and launched several high-profile operations, mostly to obtain weapons. The first came on 15 April. That day, the militants attacked the Pallekelle Camp, where the 2nd (V) Armoured Corps Regiment was garrisoned, and successfully seized 12 Type 56 rifles and seven submachine guns before withdrawing. The whole attack went flawlessly, as recalled by Premakumar Gunaratnam, the JVP's Trincomalee District Secretary, who took part in it:

> On the night of April 14 1987 we met at the Marrs Hall, University of Peradeniya. We were briefed by our leaders and an ex-army man. At 2.00 AM, a vehicle picked us up from the Hall and drove us to the Pallekelle army camp. We were joined by two women. We wore military uniforms. We had only one shotgun but had several knives. We entered the camp from one side, took the guards by surprise, relieved them of their weapons, and escaped by a route along the river.[21]

The next assaults took place on 7 June and were much more impressive. Up to 20 insurgents – led again by Saman Piyasiri Fernando – invested the guardroom in the entrance of the General Sir John Kothalawala Defence Academy in the suburbs of Colombo and captured 29 weapons, including 11 Type 56 and two SLR rifles, as well as 3,300 rounds of ammunition. The same day, an estimated 75–100 militants launched a similar attack against Katunayake AB. However, despite benefitting from complicities among the SLAF personnel, the insurgents were not only repulsed, but suffered numerous losses. Several of them were killed and many others were captured, while the bounty was minimal – only 14 weapons were seized, including seven SLR rifles. The police, having noticed the increased JVP/DJV activities, in mid-March dismantled a training camp in the jungles of Uva Province, while by June around 500 suspected militants had been

arrested.[22]

The signing off the peace accord at the end of July 1987 and the riots that followed it took the JVP completely by surprise, but its leadership soon assessed these events as a golden opportunity. The UNP government was widely contested across virtually the whole political spectrum, while the bulk of the armed forces became even more disgusted. Both the army and the police proved reluctant to disperse rioters in the days that followed the accord, to the point that the government had to move elements drawn from the police Special Task Force to re-establish control. Concluding that the situation was ripe for an insurrection, the JVP politburo decided to go all-out. Its decision to escalate the conflict became crystal-clear on 18 August. That day, a DJV militant infiltrated the parliament complex in Colombo and managed to throw two hand-made grenades into a committee room where several senior officials were meeting, including the President. President Jayewardene was unhurt, but the grenades killed both the Matara District Minister Keerthi Abeywickrama and Norbert Senadheera, a clerk, while Lalith Athulathmudali, the Minister of National Security was grievously injured.[23]

Meanwhile, the movement's propaganda apparatus went all-out to promulgate its new patriotic line to make the most of the nationwide indignation against the accord and the induction of Indian troops, following its political 'front' strategy.

Dawn of the Hitmen

Those who supported the accord were defined as traitors – and were to be treated accordingly. The DJV started a campaign of political assassination, targeting leading UNP politicians and party members, as well as people active in trade unions and the student organisations affiliated with the party, beginning on 31 July 1987 when hitmen killed Jinadasa Weerasinghe, a UNP member of parliament. He was the first on a long list, among which was Harsha Abeywardene, the UNP Chairman, assassinated on 23 December 1987. Any public figure openly criticising the movement was targeted: on 28 November 1987, DJV activists threw two bombs at the house of Edmond Ranasinghe the editor of a newspaper. Unsurprisingly, within a few months, publicly criticising the insurgents was widely acknowledged as a matter of life and death.

The insurgents also initiated a murderous campaign against suspected police or security forces informants. From mid-1987, DJV posters announced that "Informants will be severely punished" and those "punished" were often killed in particularly gruesome fashion.[24] The militants also assassinated police officers, copying the Tamil militants' tactics of a decade earlier. On 11 August 1987, police Inspector Godagama was injured in Aluthgama by hitmen firing from a motorcycle, while 10 days later, two assassins murdered police Sergeant Wijesooriya in Hungama. The campaign against the police continued unabated, and in October the DJV began to hunt members of the police Counter Subversive Unit (CSU), beginning with the stabbing of Police Constable Sapukotana on 9 October. On 2 December it was the turn of Superintendent Terrence Perera – head of the police Counter Subversive Unit – to be killed by gunmen. Knives were also often used in these attacks, to save ammunition. A number of policemen on patrol were murdered or injured in this fashion. On 11 December three of them were attacked by eight insurgents armed only with knives; one of the policemen was killed, another wounded and the third managed to escape, although the militants seized the three men's weapons. Police officers were not only in danger while on service, as a number of them were killed off-duty at home. This wave of assassinations proved quite successful; by October of that year, the flow of information to the security forces had dropped significantly.

Violence was also used in order to gain public support. The DJV began to execute what it defined as "anti-social elements" – people suspected of being drug dealers or addicts or engaged in prostitution or illegal gambling. Thus creating a parallel judiciary system, the group was moving towards creating a shadow state and controlling the population. This kind of summary justice apparently allowed the movement to gain further sympathy among part of the impoverished population, as a number of criminals had been operating without fear of punishment by corrupt police officials. According to a March 1989 circular intended for the security forces, written by Major General Cecil Waidyaratne:

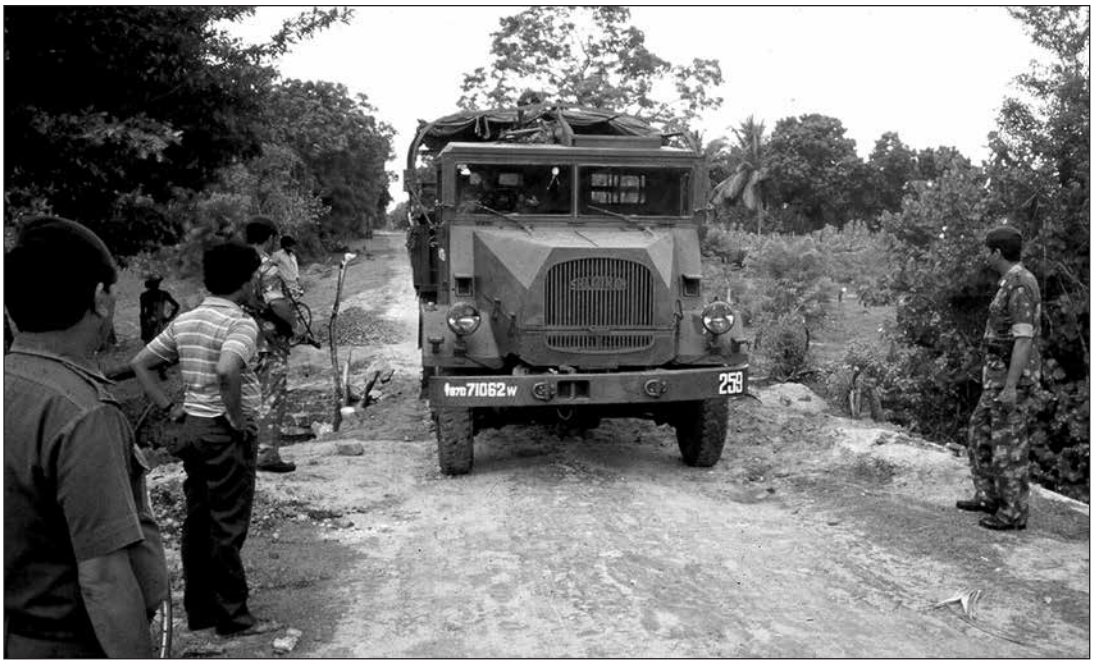
> [The] insurgents have won over hearts and minds successfully through a superficial exhibition of fair play and justice. They take punitive action against those who indulge in undisciplined acts such as molesting girls, stealing, killing innocents etc. This is their main strategy to win hearts and minds apart from other forms of indoctrination.[25]

On average no fewer than 10 people were assassinated every day during the second half of 1987 – and this was only the beginning.[26] Matters became even worse from the beginning of 1988. In mid-January, the DJV initiated what it called a "National Campaign to punish traitors to the motherland" and extended its political murder campaign to its closest ideological rivals, the other left-wing parties. Its hitmen began to kill militants of movements such as the Communist Party, the Sri Lanka Mahajana Pakshaya (Sri Lanka People's Party), the LSSP and the NSSP. Meanwhile, attacks against the UNP continued unabated, and on 20 May 1988, Nandalal Fernando, the Secretary General of the UNP, was assassinated. At about the same time, the DJV openly issued a death threat to all MPs and senior government officials – unless they resigned. The insurgents later escalated their campaign against the mass media and executed several prominent journalists. Countless people were also killed in the countryside to serve as an example and intimidate their communities into submission.[27]

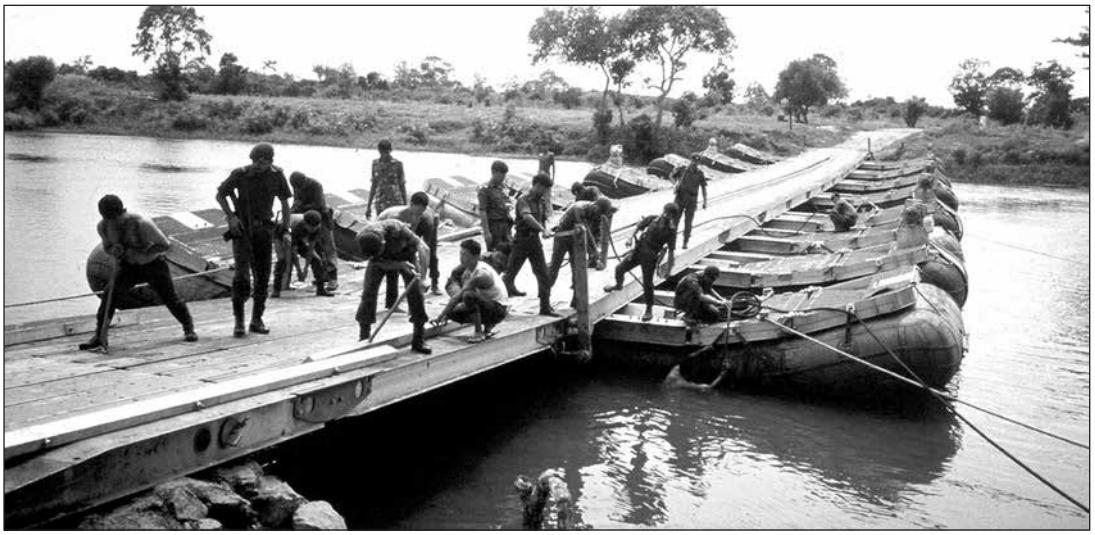
The movement thus gained sufficient traction to deploy its most spectacular weapon, known as the "hartals." The JVP launched numerous curfews, strikes and demonstrations at destabilising the national economy and increasing the pressure on the government. However, it was not politically powerful enough to mobilise the majority of the population by peaceful means alone. Hence, the DJV's fearsome reputation proved an essential tool to ensure that JVP instructions were widely followed. In turn, this generated new assassinations as people refusing to go on strike were labelled as "traitors" and a number of them were targeted by the insurgent hit squads. When, in mid-1989, the JVP attempted to enforce a strike of the Sri Lanka Transport Board, the DJV allegedly killed 130 employees for not respecting their demands, while 200 buses were also burned. The JVP's campaign of disruption culminated between September and November 1988 with a series of nationwide hartals. On occasions, public transport and the postal and telecommunications services were completely interrupted, and virtually all the shops closed. To make matters worse, the DJV also repeatedly sabotaged electricity pylons or transformers to trigger power shortages, or felled trees across roads to interrupt traffic. The movement also organised large numbers of rallies and protests, scoring some huge propaganda victories on several occasions when security forces opened fire to disperse them. These operations continued unabated during 1989.[28]

Taking on the Security Forces

While the assassination campaigns persisted, the insurgents continued to occasionally launch higher-profile operations to capture military-grade weapons. On 28 September 1987, an estimated 15 militants infiltrated the Thangaswala army camp and got away with six rifles. One soldier was killed and another was wounded. A few days later, on 4 October, around 50 insurgents raided another SLA camp at Kallar in Trincomalee district and seized 14 firearms, including six Type 56s, a 60mm mortar and 2,050 7.62mm and .303" rounds, while inflicting four SLA casualties. On 30 December, it was the turn of the Kahawatte police station, where two police officers were injured and 15 weapons taken.



One of the major early problems the IPKF contingent experienced was destroyed bridges and mines laid by the LTTE – and then the JVP. It took lengthy work by Indian Army engineers to make numerous roads passable. (Albert Grandolini Collection)



A pontoon bridge constructed by Indian Army engineers to connect two islets along the northern coast of the Jaffna Peninsula. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

However, things did not always go the insurgents' way. On 11 January 1988, an attack against the army's Kumbuke training camp was repulsed, although three soldiers were wounded. Two days later, 12 insurgents ambushed a five-man patrol – which suffered one wounded in action but killed three of the attackers. The three dead insurgents turned out to be active police officers.[29] The next major action came on 22 April 1988, when the DJV attacked Katunayake AFB again, this time with better results. The insurgents still suffered heavy casualties – the garrison defending the base reported to have killed six militants and taken prisoner another 12, for the loss of four casualties – but seized 30 Type 56 assault rifles and a single SLR, as well as one MG3 machine gun. Another large cache of weapons – with two SLRs and 31 shotguns – resulted from an attack on the Madulsima police station by a reported 50 insurgents on 16 July 1988. The much more vulnerable police officers remained targets of choice, with similar attacks being conducted against the Gothatuwa, Moratumulla, Padukka, Mattakkuliya, Ragama, Bambalapitiya and Kirulapona police stations between 22 September 1988 and 15 March 1989. During the night of 31 October and 1 November 1988, the DJV invested the Pannala National Auxiliary Force training camp, around 50km from Colombo and occupied by 100 trainees and 35 other personnel, after lengthy preparations. The insurgents benefited from extensive intelligence from a cook working in the camp, and after a fire-fight of several hours, they retreated with a hithertoo unheard-of cache of 460 firearms, including 22 Type 56 assault rifles, and 50,000 rounds of ammunition.[30]

It was an embarrassing paradox for the JVP/DJV propaganda that while all the time claiming to fight against the Indian presence in Sri Lanka, it had never actually taken on the IPKF. It was only in July 1989 that the politburo ordered the JVP's Trincomalee district committee to attack Indian troops. A small team of DJV fighters prepared an ambush in the vicinity of Mollipathana, mostly relying on landmines, as recalled by one of the insurgents:

> [The] mine was meant for a truck which was to transport soldiers who were guarding the roadway for the movement of a convoy. Eight of us were involved in this operation. We had only one T-56 weapon … Sarath Kule had positioned two mines – the plan was to slow down the speed of the vehicle by exploding the first mine and this to be followed by the explosion of the second mine which would wreck the truck and kill the Indians.[31]

The attack, which took place on 25 July, was a success, although the first of the two mines failed to explode. The ambush team lost no casualties and captured one light machine gun and one submachine

A radioman of an Indian Army unit sitting in the rear of a jeep – part of a convoy about to move out. By late 1987, attacks on IPKF convoys by the LTTE, and marginally by the JVP, became widespread. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

gun, claiming to have killed 14 Indian soldiers and wounded another three. The DJV conducted a second similar attack in the heart of Trincomalee, with unknown results.[32]

From mid-1987 and throughout 1988, the few high-profile operations, but most importantly the combination of strikes, public rallies as well as the terror campaign by DJV hitmen, were largely giving the impression that the JVP was winning and that the situation was out of the authorities' control. The militants were growing more and more confident, while thousands of youths were continuing to rally to its ranks.[33]

However, despite appearances, the JVP/DJV ascendency was fragile, and from the end of 1988 a series of factors completely turned the tables on the insurgents. Presidential elections on 19 December 1988 were won by UNP candidate Ranasinghe Premedasa. Ironically, in October that year, benefiting from the fictional split between itself and its armed wing, the JVP had entered into an anti-UNP political coalition with the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and several smaller parties – only to back track and proclaim an outright ban on the elections. As a result, only 55% of the population voted, but the ban proved more effective in areas traditionally supporting the SLFP, because the JVP was strongly implicated in the ban. Hence, the JVP actually contributed to Premedasa's victory, gambling that a UNP President would be less politically threatening than an SFLP one. It soon transpired, however, that the opposite was true. Premedasa came from a humble social background and was thus well liked among the general population. Furthermore, he was widely known as a fierce opponent to the Indo-Sri Lankan accord, but also to the IPKF presence in Sri Lanka, thus making JVP attempts to denounce him as a "traitor" and "Indian pawn" much less credible than with President Jayewardene.

The new president confirmed the holding of general elections on 15 February 1989 to renew parliament, while making overtures to the JVP by freeing around 1,800 militants and suspending the state of emergency that had been in place for years. However, the JVP's reaction was to expand its terror campaign, this time by targeting SLFP politicians and attempting to enforce a ban on the February elections, threatening candidates. The government had to provide six bodyguards for each of the 3,393 candidates. Meanwhile, the DJV declared that the first voters to present themselves to the polls would be executed. Around 430 people were killed between 11 and 16 February alone, but this did not prevent roughly 65% of the electors from casting their vote. The new parliament still included a UNP majority, with 125 seats out of 225. Two months later, Premedasa repeated his offer to open talks both with the JVP and the LTTE, and on 1 June he publicly asked for an Indian withdrawal, reinstating emergency rule a month later. A few weeks previously, the insurgents had announced a new ban, this time against the consumption of Indian goods, and as always threatened death for those who did not follow their instructions. Within a few months, the government had dealt with the two most crucial political grievances widely shared among the population – the IPKF presence and the absence of parliamentary elections for a decade – thus depriving the JVP propaganda of two of its most efficient political arguments. By simultaneously refusing repeated offers to negotiate while the government was satisfying their most crucial demands, the insurgents' leadership also blundered into inflicting themselves a major political blow. By taking on the SLFP, after the UNP and the other far-left parties, they had also made sure that everybody understood that they were at war with virtually everybody else but themselves. The insurgents had hoped that their disruption of economic life would turn the population against the government, but this increasingly proved mere wishful thinking. To the contrary, growing numbers of Sri Lankans held the JVP responsible for the endless difficulties they were facing, from shortages of common goods to power cuts, as well as disruption to transport and medical services.[34]

Loss of Control

Aside from the political blunders committed by its own leadership, the JVP was plagued by its increasing inability to use violence adequately; that is, in a cohesive manner with its own political agenda. The cause of this trend lay in the limited number of cadres and militants who had benefited from thorough political indoctrination before 1987. This small pool suffered from extensive attrition once the JVP launched the insurgency, while the movement recruited growing numbers of militants thereafter. In the meantime, it was extremely difficult to provide similar indoctrination to the new recruits because of the lack of secure bases. This was made even worse by the JVP's 'front' strategy; the first wave of post-1983 militants were rallying to the JVP as first and foremost a communist movement, while the post-1987 volunteers were attracted by the movement's nationalist and anti-Indian ideological propaganda, as made clear by one former JVP cadre:

> [The] best comrades – these are the comrades that fought first in 1987 – the majority of them were captured and a certain amount of them were assassinated. So suddenly in 1987, there was a huge vacuum. In numbers it was around 500–600, but they were the best

cadres, the best ones. They had been fighting for the party for 10, 15, 20 years … because of the requirement the vacuum was filled very quickly, very rapidly. Most of the positions were held by the newcomers … the party composition was changed

Most of the newcomers had nationalist sentiments, but they didn't act as nationalist in the DJV. They didn't have the opportunity. But it doesn't mean that they had become Marxist Leninists. They were not class conscious, but at the same time they didn't do what they wanted. But in 1988–1989 what happened – the forces joining the DJV keeps expanding – now the JVP did not have the control of these forces … they were responsible for a number of attacks at village level, but the JVP did not want to … finally the image of the JVP was deteriorating rapidly. Within a few months the JVP's total image was deteriorated.[35]

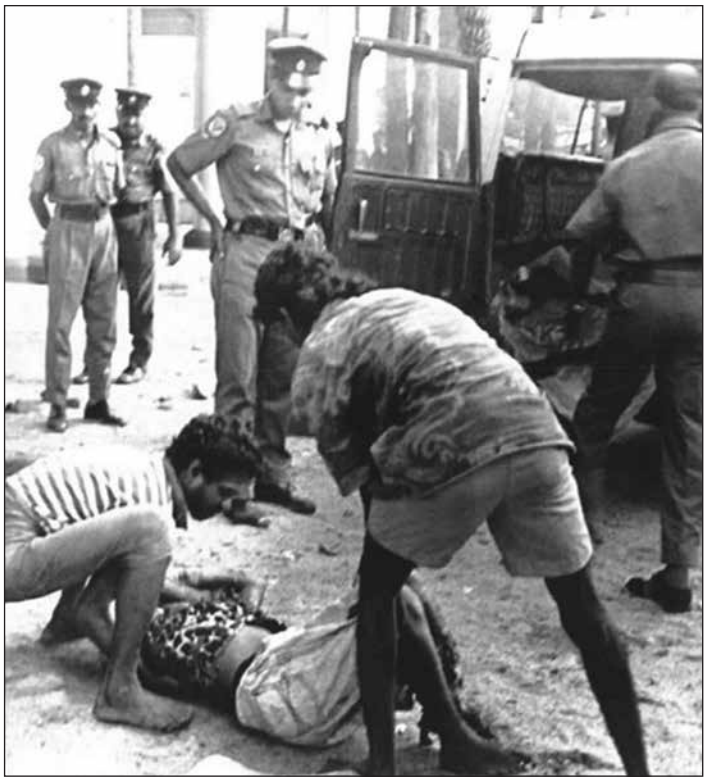
In a nutshell, and according to its own conception, the party thus committed the cardinal sin of losing control over the guns. Furthermore, the less-disciplined DJV militants became overconfident, thus taking fewer precautions to avoid being identified by the security forces, while their actions had predictable results on public opinion, as explained by another former JVP cadre:

In 1988–1989 all the incidents happen. A lot of bad things happen. Just imagine you're a bus driver, you are a poor, poor bloke. You are taking your passengers to a destination and some of them are sick; going to the doctors. And because I am a patriotic JVP, I am a leader of the DJV and I ask you not to drive. And you say "I have passengers … I am serving the people". [You are] shot in the head and killed. That's not a good thing to do. That's not JVP, that's not Marxist Leninist.[36]

Security Forces in Turmoil

The JVP/DJV expansion and apparent supremacy between 1987 and 1988 was made possible not only by the movement's strengths, but also by the multiple problems that plagued the security forces' initial reaction. The army in particular was also reluctant to engage the Sinhalese insurgents. Large numbers of soldiers had felt betrayed by the cancellation of Operation *Liberation* in May 1987, as well as the subsequent Indo-Sri Lankan accord, feeling that the military had been robbed of its imminent victory against the LTTE, and thus were lacking motivation to turn on insurgents who were claiming exactly the same thing. This made it easy for the JVP/DJV militants to infiltrate the armed forces, and the intelligence thus gathered allowed them to launch spectacular operations time and again.

The police elite Special Task Force (STF) formed the initial spearhead to fight the insurgents, and the bulk of it was redeployed from the Batticaloa area, where it had fought the Tamil insurgents toward southern Sri Lanka from September 1987, where it established a series of camps. However, the STF and other police forces had nowhere near enough manpower to face the insurgent threat, so the SLA was mobilised. By mid-1988, four infantry battalions were deployed in the Southern Province alone.[37] These four units managed to clear the town of Galle and its surroundings without much trouble, as the insurgent presence there was weak, but this proved the exception rather than the rule. Most of the counter-insurgency operations followed the cordon and search pattern, with large numbers of troops trying to seal an area before searching it. From time to time such operations gave results, as on 24 January 1988 when five militants were killed and several weapons retrieved in the Katukiswatte area, or on 26 February when a small camp near Chimigalakande was discovered, triggering a fire-fight during which four militants were killed and another captured. However, usually, and as in northern Sri Lanka previously, these cordon and search operations proved easy to avoid by the small groups of militants as the security forces tended to move only during daytime and in comparatively large groups.



Civilians removing the body of another victim of the countless assassinations in Sri Lanka in 1987-88, while police officers stand by. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

A dedicated joint force, under Operation *Combine*, was also activated in November 1987. Led by Brigadier Vijaya Wimalartane, the command covered the Colombo district and initially included, aside from police forces, 36 infantry platoons, reinforced to 58 by mid-1988. However, the army units attached to Operation *Combine* had an essentially passive role, largely by guarding crossroads and critical locations.

The lack of a unified and cohesive command chain unifying all the stakeholders in the counter-insurgency war also made the task of both the police officers and soldiers almost impossible. For instance, the CO of Operation *Combine* had to answer simultaneously to the Ministry of Defence, to the inter-service Operational Headquarters and to the army headquarters.[38] Intelligence work on the JVP/DJV was divided between five different entities: the National Intelligence Bureau (NIB), the police's Counter Subversive Unit (CSU) and Colombo Detective Bureau, the Military Intelligence and Operation *Combine*, which had its own investigation capabilities.[39]

Perhaps the worst failure was the absence of an all-encompassing strategy aside from repression until the end of 1988, when such plans began to be considered. Hence, during the insurgency's first two years, virtually no attempts were made to re-establish a presence in the villages under insurgent influence to compete with the JVP propaganda by providing enhanced social services – and most importantly, decent job opportunities for the youth. Most of the time, the army officers active in these areas were well aware of this crucial shortcoming, as emphasised by the CO of a SLA brigade:

The army can only do so much. It can restore the situation to a point. But if there is no effort to address the socio-economic causes, all this will come back. We have to have some sort of plan to guide

> us. But I doubt if we'll get it. The politicians have made a real mess of things. We can't expect people who are a part of the problem to recognize it.[40]

However, in early 1989, the government began at last to place a greater emphasis on countering the insurgents' propaganda, but these efforts remained limited. On the other hand, the security forces were reorganising themselves, adapting their tactics and thus becoming more effective. That year, three area commands were created to control the whole country. In Area One and Two, which corresponded to Central and Southern Sri Lanka, each province was allocated to a brigade, and most of the districts to a battalion. In turn, the COs of these units were acting as coordinating officers and oversaw all security forces operations in their area of responsibility. The troops established platoon or two platoon-sized camps. In turn, these garrisons were divided into three elements – a guard group, a reinforcement group and a deep penetrating group. While the first stayed in the camp, the two others patrolled, preferably in small teams. The troops were instructed not to follow regular route patterns, and to set ambushes or roadblocks at random places and times. An emphasis was also placed on night operations. These new tactics were much better adapted to tackle the insurgents, which were also operating in small groups most of the time. Similarly, in July 1989, Operation *Combine* was reorganised by Major General Cecil Waidyaratne and brought under a single command. It was also reinforced until it included 100 platoons of military personnel, including SLN and SLAF troops.[41]

Fatal Blunder

As already mentioned, the JVP strategy was to turn the bulk of the army against the government. Accordingly, most of the DJV attacks targeted the police, while militants engaged in weapon-retrieving operations against army bases were instructed to not kill servicemen if this could be avoided. The insurgents' leadership had assessed that 20% of the armed forces rank and file were fiercely dedicated to eliminating them, 50% remained more or less neutral and the remaining 30% were potential sympathisers. However, by the mid-1989 the mutinies in the armed forces expected by the insurgents had failed to materialise. The JVP politburo was also worried by the security forces' increased efficiency, as well as by Ranasinghe Premedasa's change of political stance related to India. It was therefore decided to go a step further to trigger unrest in the armed forces. As a result, the DJV issued several warnings to armed forces personnel to desert or face the consequences – not only for them, but for their families.[42]

The expected results of such threats was to specifically terrorise the 20% fiercely opposed to the insurgents and entice the majority of the other servicemen to turn against them. It was actually not the first time that such threats had been issued, notably against Special Task Force troopers, but these went relatively unnoticed. This time however, and because the movement had partly lost control over its armed wing, several DJV hitmen acted without waiting for any specific instructions from their top command and executed family members of military personnel on several occasions.[43] Unsurprisingly, this instantly unified the armed forces against the insurgents, as recalled by one SLA officer: "Even the fellows who were sweeping the camps went out with their broomsticks against the JVP."[44]

The Death Squads

By the end of 1987, new actors began to take part in the cycle of violence engulfing the country as influential politicians and police officers began to organise their own death squads, most of the time known only by generic names such as the Green Tigers, Yellow Cats, Eagles, Scorpions or the Black Cats. By October 1988, an equally elusive People's Revolutionary Red Army had also appeared and committed its first assassinations the following month. Most of these groups had obvious links with the security services. For instance, in March 1989, the Black Cats executed 14 militants and left their bodies precisely at a spot where several police officers had been previously killed by a landmine. However, the death squads' composition and chain of command always remained mysterious. Different death squads sometimes claimed their assassinations under the same name, while other simply stayed silent and never published claims for their actions. What is certain, however, is that these groups killed countless suspected JVP/DJV militants. Yet they were operating in an uncoordinated fashion and lacked the intelligence necessary to inflict decisive blows against the insurgents. Furthermore, they executed large numbers of innocents too, in turn making it easy for the insurgents to recruits new militants among such victims' families.[45]

A group of JVP militants: the organisation outmanoeuvred itself with its threats against the Sri Lankan military and attacks on police stations. (Rohan Gunaratna Collection)

The JVP's August 1989 threats against military personnel's families triggered a change of paradigm, with the emergence of far more effective death squads. While remaining in essence anonymous, they began to operate in a much more systematic way and in closer coordination with the security forces. Within days, posters and bulletins were widely circulated with a response to the DJV threat: "Twelve of yours for one of ours!"[46] This was not mere rhetoric: after the DJV assassination of the families of three servicemen in the Menikhinna area, 200 inhabitants from a neighbouring village renowned for its JVP

A group of JVP insurgents showing weapons they captured from security services. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

sympathies were executed during the night of 14 September 1989. Meanwhile, another death squad, calling itself the Deshapremi Sinhala Tharuna Peramuna (Patriotic Singala Youth Front), sent the following warning to JVP militant families:[47]

> Is it then right that you who are the wife/mother/sister of this person who engages in inhuman murder or your children should be free to live? Is it not justified to put you to death? From this moment, you and all your family members must be ready to die! May you attain Nirvana![48]

In essence, the security forces thus 'turned DJV' by using exactly the same tactics as them, and on a much larger scale. Even 'officially' conducted operations with uniformed servicemen became known as 'Search-Interrogate-Destroy' as they almost invariably ended with the summary execution of the captured militants. A perfect example of the vicious circle of terror and counter-terror that had stricken Sri Lanka was Deputy Inspector General of Police Premadasa Udugampola. The DJV executed the police officer's mother, brother, wife and children, thus creating one of its worst nemeses. Claiming to be "fighting the enemy, their way", Udugampola organised several 15-man teams, operating under cover. Their members were not only well-trained, but were also selected because they had previously lost family members at the hand of the insurgents, and thus were not inclined to show any mercy to them. Such death squads went on the rampage, executing all suspected militants – and, on a number of occasions, their families too – in their area. From August 1989, an average of 25–50 bodies were found along country roads every single day. While both security forces and death squads were assessed to have killed 8,000 militants up to July 1989, the number of executions between August 1989 and the following January reached 15,000.[49]

End of an Insurgency

It soon became obvious that the JVP could not cope with the mixture of its political loss of legitimacy, the increased efficiency of the security forces and the wave of assassinations committed by the death squads. To make matters worse, Sri Lankan forces invested tremendous resources into tracking down the insurgent leadership. In October 1989, a decisive breakthrough came with the capture of D. M. Ananda, (an alias of Dissanayake Mudiyanselage Nandasena), leader of the JVP Bikkhu Wing and a politburo member. The high-ranking JVP cadre talked and gave up the names and locations of other key insurgent figures, some of whom also provided information, allowing the security forces to capture and summarily execute five JVP politburo members by the end of November, including Rohana Wijeweera. The latter was arrested on 12 November in a countryside estate in Ulapane, where he was hiding under a false identity, and killed the following day after being interrogated. The Sri Lankan authorities had no intention of showing any mercy, as stated by Ranjan Wijeratne, the minister of foreign affairs and defence: "They had no right to live, they had taken so many lives."[50]

The death of the movement's charismatic historic leader was a decisive blow, especially as politburo member Upatissa Gamanayaka was also caught and killed on 12 November. What definitely broke the JVP's back was the capture and death on 27 December of Saman Piyasiri Fernando, who had taken over as the movement's leader after the demise of Wijeweera. Indeed, by January 1990, only one politburo member was still alive, while the Central Committee was decimated. The JVP was thus decapitated, which proved fatal for the heavily centralised organisation.[51] Crucial to the insurgents' ultimate demise in a mere few months was that the counter-terror campaign unleashed by the security forces and death squads followed a deliberate strategy, as emphasised by the Wijeratne:

> The JVP put us against the wall. They motivated us to hit back. When you are against the wall you have nothing to lose. I hit right round, peripheries, middle and the top, and as the attack was simultaneous, the results were brilliant. The JVP had no chance in that strategy to find out from where the fire was coming. … In any operation of this nature you must hit at the top. If you hit at the

Rohana Wijeweera, shortly before his execution. (Rohan Gunaratna Collection)

> bottom they are replaced; you are wasting your time and resources. … I started this beginning August 1989 … and after the first week of November, the politburo of the JVP was in the bag. Once the politburo was smashed, it was only a mopping up operation that was necessary.[52]

CHAPTER 3
OPERATION *PAWAN*

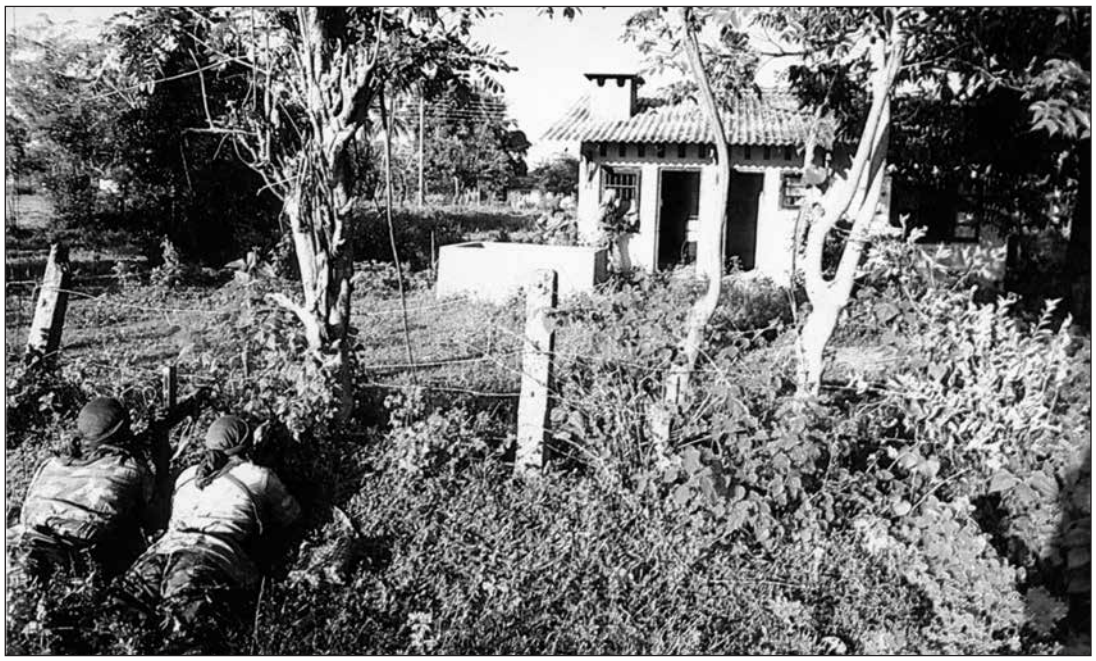
Events moved fast following the collective suicide of the 12 LTTE cadres on 5 October 1987. Within a few days, the IPKF had to transition from peacekeeping to open battle. In reprisal for the loss of his cadres, Velupillai Prabhakaran ordered his militants to take on the Sinhalese still staying in Jaffna, as he explained to a group of female militants at the time:

> The loss of my best boys is a great tragedy for our movement. We have lost more leaders in peacetime than war. … The death of my men has to be avenged, so yesterday I ordered my boys to finish off any Sinhalese who have come to claim our land using the peace as an excuse.[1]

A still from a video showing LTTE militants with the bodies of Indian troops ambushed and then executed on 10 October 1987. (Adrien Fontanellaz Collection)

The Tigers assassinated several Sinhalese police officers and civilians in the Jaffna Peninsula. The militants also executed eight SLA soldiers and police officers they had held captive for months and disposed of their bodies near Jaffna's main bus station. Furthermore, on 5 and 6 October, the insurgents opened fire on the Point Pedro, Thondamannar and Jaffna Fort SLA garrisons. The worst attacks came in the Eastern Province and the Northern Province's southern parts, where the LTTE area leaders launched a series of vicious attacks against villages of Sinhalese settlers in contested areas, killing about 150 civilians.[2]

These attacks against Sinhalese villages put the Indians under tremendous pressure. On 6 October, President Jayewardene told General Krishnaswamy Sunderji, the Indian Army Chief of Staff, that he would send in the Sri Lanka Army if the IPKF did not take action to protect these areas. Around the same time, Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had decided to order the Indian troops to disarm the LTTE by force. On 8 October, Major General Harkirat Singh, CO of the 54th Air Assault Division which was covering the Northern Province, was ordered to do so. During the night of 9-10 October, the 1st Mahratta Light Infantry (1 Mahratta LI) moved from its quarters in the Jaffna Fort and struck at LTTE media outlets in the town. The Indian soldiers destroyed the printing press of the newspapers *Eelamurasu* and *Murasolu*, while raids were also conducted to neutralise the Nidharsanam TV station as well as a radio station.



Indian troops assaulting a suspect house during their crackdown against the LTTE on 10 October 1987. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Unsurprisingly, this triggered a strong reaction from the Tigers, who opened fire against the 1 Mahratta LI soldiers while they withdrew to the fort. Twenty-seven weapons were retrieved and around 100 suspected militants captured during the crackdown, which also affected other areas. However, it turned out that the Tigers were ready for such an eventuality, reacting within hours. On 10 October, a mass rally was organised in Jaffna, with thousands of people moving to the gates of the Palali base to protest against the IPKF action of the previous night, while an LTTE squad ambushed a jeep carrying five soldiers of the 10th Para Commando Battalion

A badly injured soldier is evacuated by a Chetak helicopter of the Indian Army: such scenes were to repeat themselves ever more often during late 1987. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

A squadron of female LTTE militants at attention. They all wore a combination of civilian clothes – a suitable 'excuse' in case any were captured or killed in combat – and ammunition pouches. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

(10 Para Commando) moving from Palali to Kankesanthurai and executed them. The militants also engaged a patrol of the 1 Mahratta LI trying to sally from the Jaffna Fort to shell the latter.

Death of a Tigress

Another clash occurred in Kopay village, a crucial road junction around 5km from Jaffna that was held in force by the LTTE. During the night of 9-10 October, the 4th Battalion of the Mahar Regiment (4 Mahar), which was advancing from Navatkuli according to the general outline of Operation *Pawan*, met with determined resistance from carefully prepared positions. Among the insurgents were two female squads, and in the initial firefights, Malathy, one of the squad leaders, was killed, becoming the first LTTE female fighter killed in action, as recalled by Janani, another Tigress:

> We were in our bunkers firing at the army. Hundreds of Indian troops had jumped out of their vehicles and were firing as they moved toward us. Mortar shells were exploding everywhere. … Malathy was shot in both legs. She couldn't move and she was bleeding profusely. Realising she was mortally wounded, she swallowed cyanide.[3]

Two other female fighters were also captured. Surprised by the determined onslaught of the Indian troops, the LTTE squads had to withdraw from their first defensive line, but other militants were rushed to the area. These not only managed to block any further advance from 4 Mahar, but also surrounded it.

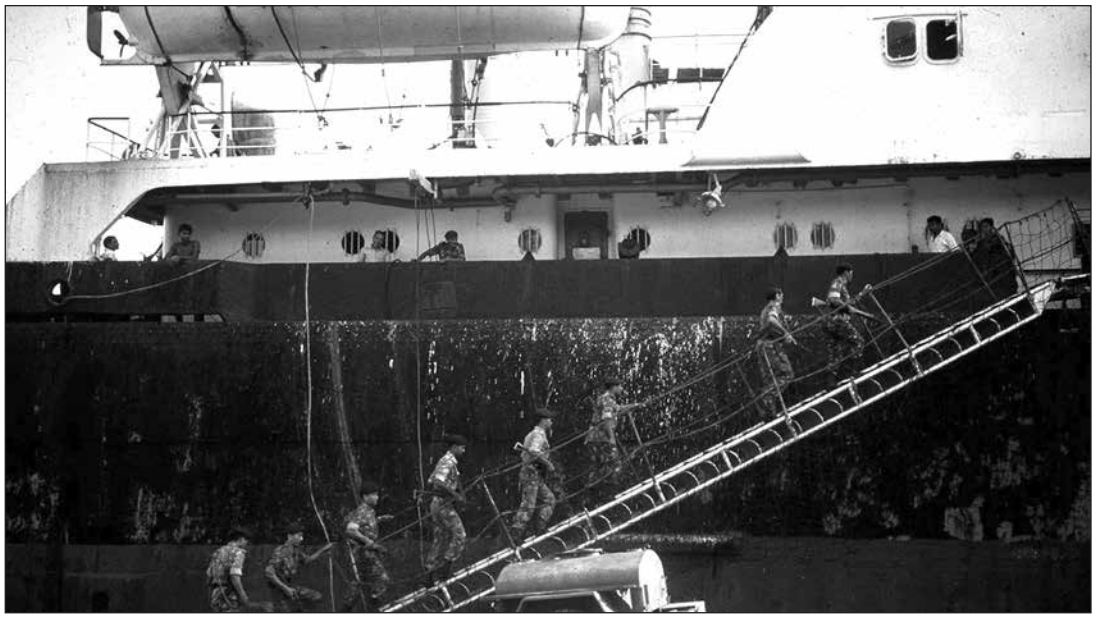
The Tigers struck in the Trincomalee district too. A position of the 5 Madras in Tellipallai was mortared and machine-gunned, while a detachment of the 58th Battalion of the Indian Central Police Reserve Force (CPRF) was ambushed while moving on the road between Tellipalai and Periyavilian, losing four men killed and another wounded.[4]

IPKF Build Up

When ordered to go all-out against the LTTE, and thus initiate Operation *Pawan*, the CO of the 54th Air Assault Division was anything but enthusiastic and objected that an offensive should be postponed to be better prepared, while the difficulties of attacking at the beginning of the monsoon was in any case a doubtful proposition. However, Major General Singh's objections were overruled. While General Sunderji boasted that Jaffna could be taken in a few days, the LTTE's fighting capabilities were widely underestimated, not only by him but by a number of Indian officers, one of whom reportedly commented: "What can these boys in lungi [sarong] and shorts do to one of the world's most powerful militaries?"[5]

Thus, both IPKF CO Lieutenant General Depinder Singh and Major General Harkirat Singh had no choice but to make the most of the few, widely dispersed battalions immediately available in the peninsula and concluded that their best option was to launch a multi-pronged operation almost immediately, with several units advancing along different axis toward the heart of Jaffna town. Taking the initiative in that fashion would prevent the Tigers from concentrating their forces against any one of these prongs or to gain any breathing space to reinforce themselves. The capture of Jaffna was supposed to take a week and was to be followed by phased advances until the whole of the peninsula was under IPKF control.[6]

By early October, rising tensions made it obvious that reinforcements were needed. Thanks to a massive effort by IAF transport squadrons, which flew 173 An-12, An-32 and Il-76 flights on 4 and 5 October alone – and a total of 2,200 transport missions between 11 and 31 October – the IPKF was increased massively in size. On 3 October, 340th Independent Brigade had begun to arrive in Trincomalee, where it was followed from 7 October by the 36th Infantry Division. The induction of the latter's headquarters allowed 54th Air Assault Division's headquarters to concentrate in Palali. Furthermore, 18th Infantry Brigade and two of its battalions were transferred from the 36th to the 54th Air Assault Division. The initiation of Operation *Pawan* further accelerated the troops' transfer to Palali to feed the



Troops of the 340th Independent Brigade embarking on a ship that took them to Trincomalee in early October 1987. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

fast-escalating battle at Jaffna: 72nd Infantry Brigade began its induction on 10 October, and was followed by 41st Infantry Brigade five days later and finally 115th Infantry Brigade on 18 October. Thus, 54th Air Assault Division ultimately controlled five brigades, aside from a miscellany of other units such as 10 Para Commando, a mechanized infantry company, a tank squadron and a light artillery battery. However, this rush also meant that all these units transitioned virtually overnight from a peace station to vicious urban fighting, and, aside from being wrong-footed, most of them were also almost half-strength.[7]

Tigers' Confidence

Ironically, the Indian assessment of the LTTE's ability was shared by several of the latter's leaders, who warned Prabhakaran about the risks of waging a war against the Indian Army. However, the LTTE was convinced that the IPKF could be defeated in the same fashion as the Vietnamese did with the Americans less than two decades earlier: by wearing them down.[8] The movement's leader and several of its military commanders were also extremely confident in their fighters' abilities. Indeed, Kittu (an alias of Sathasivam Krishnakumar), the former Jaffna military commander, boasted while in Madras: "The Indian army has not fought a war since 1971. We will teach it how to fight."[9]

Crucially, and concluding that the extensive preparations they had made during the previous year to repulse a large-scale Sri Lankan offensive targeting Jaffna city from the eastern coast of the Jaffna Peninsula were adequate to see off a similar IPKF onslaught, the LTTE leaders decided to face the Indian troops head-on. Mahattaya (alias Gopalaswamy Mahendraraja), the movement's second-in-command, was tasked with conducting the battle from 10 October onwards. Once the decision to fight a protracted battle was taken, the other regional commanders dispatched around 1,000 fighters to reinforce the combatants already in the peninsula. By 10 October, these numbers included around 80 trained female fighters organised in five squads. While the male fighters could instantly pretend to be normal civilians once they discarded their weapon, the LTTE's 'Birds of Freedom' fighters[10] were easier to identify as guerrillas because they invariably fought in dark coloured jeans and similarly patterned shirts, and with their hair tied in pigtails, and thus looked very different to the average Tamil woman.

To defend Jaffna city, the militants could rely on three successive and carefully prepared defensive lines. The first of these was anchored on the Sandipai, Chunnakam and Puttur localities, while the second followed the Kotitadi, Kopai North, Urumpurai, Kondavil, Manipai and Arali roads. The last line was directly on the outskirt of Jaffna city, along the Navatkuli-Kopai–South Kokuvil axis. In essence, these lines consisted of carefully camouflaged and sometimes reinforced firing positions emplaced to cover the main axis leading to Jaffna. Often, these were emplaced in houses. Most importantly, these were integrated with mazes of homemade minefields that the militants rushed to reinforce as soon as hostilities began. Some of these IEDs were extremely powerful and could disable armoured vehicles, while others were patterned along the claymore design, or were the much simpler 'Johnny' contact AP (anti-personnel) mine. The militants were also adept at setting vicious booby traps, for instance connecting large charges in houses to light or fan switches.

By October 1987 the Tigers had gained a lot of experience facing the Sri Lanka Army's attempts to break through their camps between the end of 1985 and mid-1987, and thus were well-versed in dynamic defence operations. They did not merely defend their strongpoints, but routinely launched infiltrations against enemy columns and initiated flanking attacks or set ambushes behind them to cut them off from their logistical support. On other occasions, they could deliberately withdraw after offering some limited resistance at a specific point, only to entice the advancing enemy to enter well-prepared killing zones. The LTTE also made lavish use of snipers, who fired from elevated positions such as rooftops or from the top of water tanks, often establishing firing positions under the top of palmyra trees by fixing a chair to the trunk. These snipers were instructed to target enemy officers, whom they had learned to recognise by their rank insignia or by the radio operator shadowing them. Similarly, the Tigers sited light machine-gun (LMG) teams on platforms in trees, which gave them excellent firing ranges while being difficult to detect. The militants also changed their firing positions often to keep the enemy off-balance.

However, despite all their experience, excellent training and fanatical dedication, the LTTE fighters were no 'guerrilla supermen' either. One of their most important flaws was a lack of tactical knowledge about conducting coordinated infantry attacks, which repeatedly caused them heavy casualties. Another major limitation, soon noticed by the Indians, was that they seldom fought at night. Besides this, while adept at infiltrating the enemy's rear, the militants themselves tended to abandon their positions and retreat if they felt that they were bypassed by enemy forces.

The Indian troops were not only instructed to limit their use of support weapons to avoid collateral damage, but were equipped with SLR rifles which could fire only on semi-automatic mode, or even hopelessly obsolete Sten SMGs. The LTTE fighters thus had the advantage of firepower in close-range battles, as most of them were

Two IPKF troops armed with Bren light machine guns. (Rohan Gunaratna Collection)

A squad of 'Birds of Freedom', as the LTTE termed its women's wing: eight such groups with a total of 80 combatants were available in October 1987. (Rohan Gunaratna Collection)

equipped with weapons such as the AK-47/AKM/Type 56 series, or M16s and G3s. Furthermore, the militants could rely on weapons such as the RPG-7 and several types of LMG, as well as their 0.50 calibre heavy machine guns (HMG). On the other hand, and contrary to earlier times, they rarely used their arsenal of homemade mortars while fighting the IPKF.

Another advantage the LTTE held over the Indians was that they were fighting a propaganda battle as much as a military one. At least during the first days of the Jaffna battle, militants deliberately mixed with Tamil civilians while approaching Indian troops before briefly opening fire and retreating; while the Indian return fire was killing civilians, in turn allowing the movement propaganda to denounce the IPKF as the 'Innocent People Killing Force'. Similarly, houses used as firing positions were sometimes still occupied by their inhabitants, with potentially deadly consequences for them if the Indians answered with heavy weapons.

By October 1987, the LTTE's available strength was something of a mystery for the Indians, and assessed to be anywhere between 2,500 and 5,000 militants. What made things especially complex is that the movement could rely on numerous 'Podians', the so-called 'helpers'. Those were not full-time militants, but could be requested to accomplish specific tasks, such as carrying messages or instructions, gathering intelligence, collecting supplies, food or even taxes. Some of them could even be mobilized for assassination missions after a few days of weapon training, before returning to their everyday occupations. The lines could be even more blurred because by then, the movement had initiated a month-long military training programme intended for its sympathisers, creating a pool of partly trained manpower that could be used to 'beef up' its fighting formations if needed.[11] The basic tactical unit continued to be 15-fighter squads, divided into two sections. Stronger forces were routinely organised on a temporary basis by assembling several squads as needed. The squads were attached to area commanders, who also controlled radio operators and weapon and explosive specialists. The next step in the hierarchy were the regional commanders, and then the top leadership. A complex and decentralised logistical network of caches and safe houses provided what was necessary for the fighting forces, while the movement also had a dedicated training command. However, the real force multiplier was the LTTE's highly efficient and sophisticated radio network, manned by well-trained specialists, which allowed it to combine all these assets extremely effectively, routinely shifting, reuniting and dispersing forces according to its objectives.[12]

A Golden Opportunity

On 10 October, the Sri Lanka Army SIGINT gave the 54th Division's HQ invaluable information. Radio intercepts had revealed that virtually the whole LTTE top leadership had its headquarters near Jaffna University, located at Kokkuvil, in the eastern suburbs of the city. Furthermore, Velupillai Prabhakaran himself was supposed to sleep in a house located in the immediate vicinity of the campus. In the meantime, other intercepts had revealed that the militants had received orders to mine the main access roads leading to the heart of Jaffna to oppose the Indian troops' advance. Raiding the university and decapitating the LTTE leadership could only considerably ease the IPKF's seizure of the city.

The decision was made to launch a night heliborne assault with a 10 Para Commando Team (CO Major Sheonan Singh) to seize the headquarters. The rest of the battalion remained in Palali under its CO, Lieutenant Colonel Dalbir Singh. Also crucial for the operation were the 72nd Infantry Brigade headquarters (CO Brigadier General B.D. Mishra) and two subordinated infantry battalions, the 13th Sikh

One of the first T-72 main battle tanks (MBT) of the Indian Army to become involved in operations against the LTTE. (Rohan Gunaratna Collection)

Indian Army troops in the process of embarking on a waiting Mi-8 helicopter of the IAF. Note the two UB-16-57 pods for unguided rockets: Mi-8s involved in the assault on the LTTE's leadership at the University Campus of Jaffna, shortly after midnight on 12 October 1987, carried no such weapons. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Light Infantry (13 Sikh LI; CO Lieutenant Colonel R.S. Sethi) and the 4th Battalion of the 5th Gorkha regiment (4/5 Gorkha, CO Colonel I.B.S. Bawa). The brigade was to benefit from the support of a troop of T-72 tanks from the 65th Armoured Regiment. While the bulk of the 13 Sikh LI was to act as a second wave and secure the landing zone (LZ) right on the heels of the Para Commando Team, 4/5 Gorkha was to advance from Palali AB along the main road connecting the latter with Kokkuvil, to link up with the airborne troops.

There were five Indian helicopters available to support the operation – a single Chetak of the 10th Air Observation Post (10 AOP) for liaison and observation duties, and No. 109 HUs' four Mi-8s. The latter were deemed enough to carry the 400 troops envisioned in an hour-an-a-half, as only four minutes of flight time were necessary to reach the university from Palali AB. The Indians also coordinated themselves with the SLAF, which agreed to provide a Bell 212 in gunship configuration. The gunship was to create a diversion by strafing areas near the intended LZ. This would be the only offensive air element involved in the raid, as only feeble resistance was expected. Indeed, the Mi-8s were not to carry their UB rocket pods to save weight and maximise the load they could carry in a single flight.[13]

However, by the evening of 11 October the whole plan had already gone through the window. Firstly, 13 Sikh LI arrived with only its C and D companies – 250 men altogether – a mere few hours before the operation, and it was only then its officers were informed about the raid, while their units had never received any training in heliborne operations. Similarly, while a single T-72 was delivered to Palali on 10 October, the next two only arrived on 12 October. Carrying the T-72s aboard the 44th Squadron Il-76s was no easy task, as the aircraft had to exceed by 7 tons the 140 ton maximum all-up weight in order to carry enough fuel for their return leg to Chennai, as there was no facility at Palali AB to refuel them. Furthermore, a flight by 10 AOP's single Chetak during the afternoon of 11 October revealed that the intended LZ allowed for the simultaneous landing of only two Mi-8s. As a result, the IAF had to reshuffle its planning and opted for waves of two helicopters, with the second pair taking off from Palali AB once the first left the LZ. This increased significantly the induction time of the raiding force, but minimised the exposure of the two helicopters that would have otherwise to loiter over the LZ while the first pair was unloading its troops. The LZ was the university's sports ground located in the middle of the campus, and was surrounded by three large buildings that could easily be used to transform it in a killing ground. The buildings' configuration forced any helicopters to approach from a single ingress road. The only other site available that could be used as a secondary LZ if needed was around 2km away.[14] Crucially, the level of intelligence was abysmal, as recalled by Major Sheonan Singh: "There was no intelligence available during our briefing, either about

the place or the strength and disposition of the enemy."[15]

Chaos in the Campus

Nonetheless, the operation was maintained, and the first two Mi-8s took off from Palali AB at 1:00 A.M. on 12 October, with the 10 Para Commando team on board, including Major Sheonan Singh. Despite bad visibility due to heavy cloud cover, which forced the helicopters to ingress at an altitude of 200 metres instead of the envisioned 300 metres, the pilots found the LZ and disembarked their troops without any hindrance. The soldiers instantly ran toward the sport field precincts to establish a defensive perimeter, and it was only then, when the noise of the aircraft disappeared, that they noticed they were under sustained small-arms fire, as recalled by one of the Para Commando: "We thought everything was fine but as we were coming out of the helicopter we came under heavy fire from all sides. It was an impossible situation. We were fighting an enemy we could not even see."[16]

The LTTE had been aware that 'something was in the air' because of the reconnaissance flight by the IPKF's Chetak, late in the afternoon, but also due to intercepts of Indian Army radio traffic. While the militant fire was initially imprecise, it was still more than enough to pin down the Indian troopers and make suicidal any attempt to light the LZ to ease the navigation of the pilots of the next wave. Meanwhile, the second pair of Mi-8s had taken off, but their pilots failed to identify the LZ, largely because the tracers of the SLAF gunship that was making its diversionary strafing runs confused them. After a time, the two helicopters returned to base without unloading their Para Commandos.

In Palali, the first pair of Mi-8s loaded another group of Para Commandos and made another shuttle flight to the sports ground. This time, however, they met with much more intensive fire, as the Tigers had figured out what was taking place and rushed fighters to the top of the Medical Faculty – the highest of the three buildings surrounding the sports ground. The arriving Mi-8s thus found themselves targeted by much heavier and better-directed fire while disembarking the second group of Para Commandos. Several projectiles struck one of the helicopters and one soldier was wounded during the landing phase.

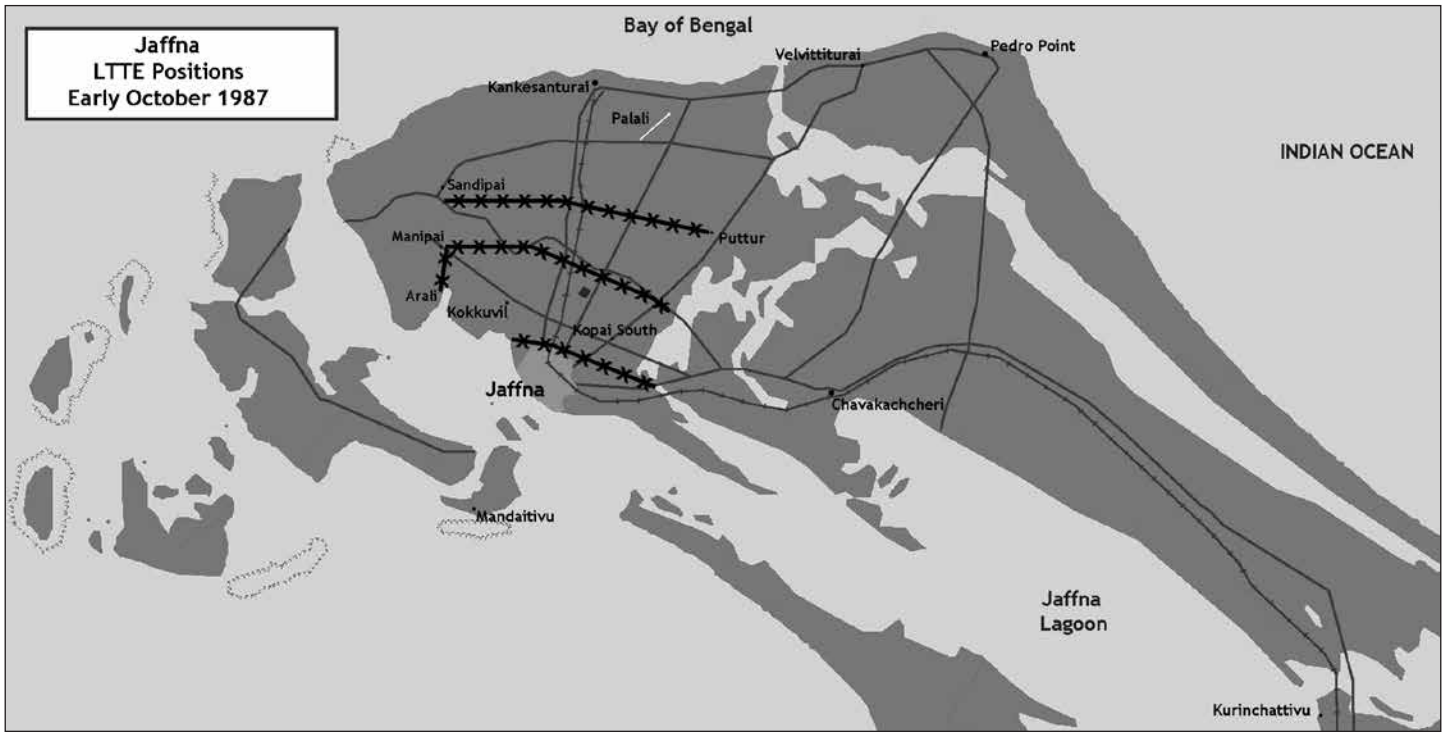
Crucial time was lost in Palali because the first platoon of D Company, 13 Sikh LI, which was to move next, was not in the immediate vicinity of the landing pad, and had to be fetched. To make matters worse, only 29 infantrymen and the company commander, Major Birendra Singh, were embarked because it was necessary to make room for 1.5 tons of mortar shells, while the mortar team itself was planned to be brought in last. This gave time for the Tigers to not only further reinforce their firing positions with RPG-7s and at least one 12.7mm HMG, but also better assess the helicopters' flight path. The two Mi-8s carrying the 13 Sikh LI soldiers flew straight into an inferno. It was a miracle that neither of the two helicopters was shot down, even more so as time was taken again to disembark the boxes containing the mortar bombs. However, once they had – barely – reached Palali, it turned out that neither of the Mi-8s were airworthy any longer. One had the battery compartment damaged and a cable sectioned, while the hydraulic system of the second had been heavily damaged. At this stage, the IAF cancelled any further flights as it was feared they could only end in disaster.[17]

One of the Sri Lanka Air Force's Bell 212s in gunship configuration, as deployed in support of the Indian assault on the Jaffna University Campus. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Para Commandos Under Siege

Hence, by 2:30 A.M., only 103 Para Commandos and 30 infantrymen had been dropped at the university, instead of the envisioned 360 men. Almost incomprehensibly, the CO of 54th Air Assault Division nonetheless ordered that the initial plan remain in place, with the Para Commandos moving out toward the LTTE headquarters and the 13 Sikh LI platoon covering the LZ. Because of a series of communication breakdowns and the lack of an *in situ* overall commander, Major Birendra Singh still expected the arrival of further 13 Sikh LI subunits and followed these orders. The Para Commandos left the infantrymen behind and moved toward the railway station, in an attempt to outflank the militants obviously blocking any direct advance toward

Indian Army troops guarding a hangar at Palali AB that was converted into the flight control centre for the IAF: this was not only a position crucial for the success of the Indian airlift to Sri Lanka, but also one of the major headquarters for the IPKF's operations against the LTTE. (Albert Grandolini Collection)



Map of the Jaffna Peninsula, with the LTTE's three major defensive lines, as of early October 1987. (Map by Tom Cooper)

the LTTE HQ on the southern side of the campus. Thus, at dawn, the 13 Sikh LI platoon found itself totally exposed and surrounded by enemies holding the high ground. By midday, all but three of the Sikh soldiers had been killed, one by one, by the LTTE snipers, with the survivors running out of ammunition. In a desperate gamble, two of them give their last ammunition to the third, who was to provide them with covering fire while they launched a bayonet charge to retrieve the platoon's medium machine gun. The Tigers instantly cut down the two, and captured Sepoy Gora Singh, their wounded comrade, who was the only survivor. Nonetheless, not everything went the LTTE's way that night. While the number of casualties it suffered remains unknown, Pottu Amman (alias Shanmugalingam Sivashankar), the head of the Tiger intelligence, was grievously injured. Furthermore, radio traffic intercepted by the SLA revealed that early on during the assault, several leaders came on the air, announcing they would probably not survive the night and that the regional commanders were to take over.[18]

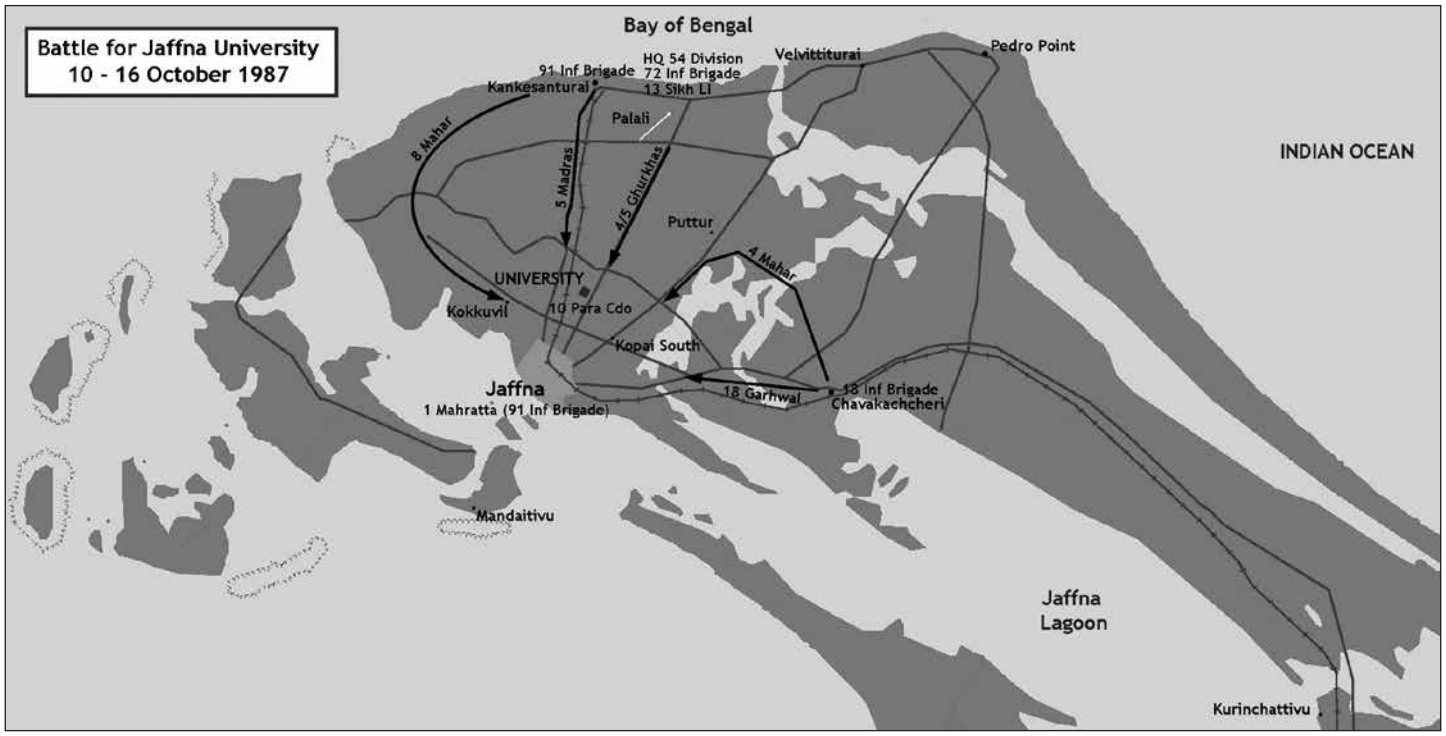
There was nothing the Para Commandos could have done to save the Sikhs soldiers. A few hundred metres after leaving the LZ, the Indian soldiers found the railway station occupied in force by the insurgents, and sighted with their night-vision goggles other groups of militants advancing in their direction. Not knowing the exact location of the LTTE HQ, Major Sheonan Singh went into the nearest house and interrogated the owner, who informed him that the headquarters was empty but gave him direction to the house where the LTTE leader was supposedly staying. Taking the owner's son-in-law as both a guide and hostage, the Para Commandos came under enemy rifle fire immediately thereafter. The hostage was executed and the Paras continued to advance a few hundred metres until they reached Pirampadi Lane, where they were briefly engaged by an insurgent firing from a house. They assaulted the place, killing the entire family occupying the house in the process. By then, the increasing volume of fire they came under convinced them that further progress in the residential area was impossible, and accordingly, Major Singh ordered his men to entrench themselves in six houses located on both sides of the lane.

By daylight, the beleaguered Para Commandos were engaged in vicious close-range fighting, with militants occupying firing positions sometimes a mere 40 metres away from their positions. Unavoidably, both sides suffered heavy casualties; a single Tiger killed three soldiers with a well-aimed burst of fire from his G3 before he was neutralized by the Indian return fire; on another occasion, virtually an entire militant section blundered in concentrating between two houses in full view of the Para Commandos, and was annihilated. The Tigers were getting the worst of it, making repeated section-sized attempts to storm one of the houses, which were invariably repulsed with heavy losses.[19]

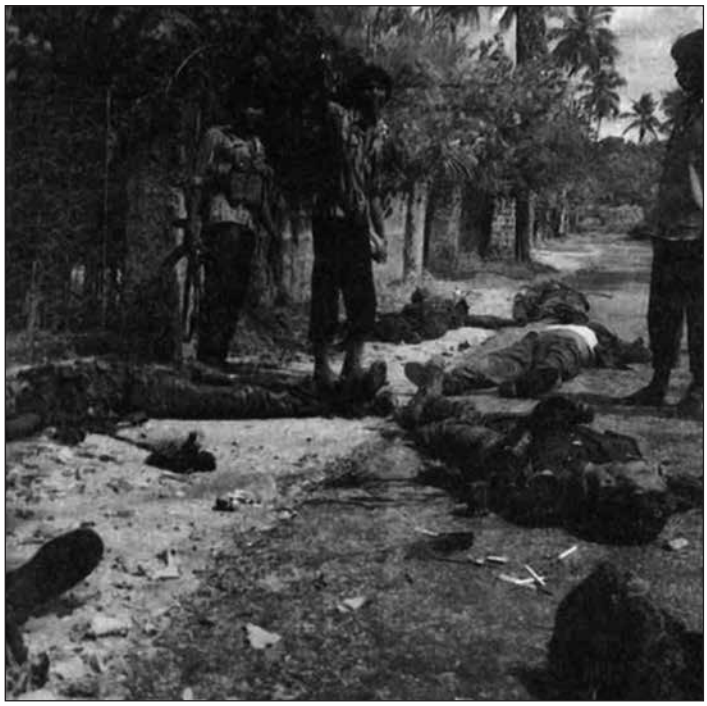
By mid-morning, fearing that his men could be overrun, Major Sheonan Singh requested artillery support, but was informed that the artillerymen in Palali did not have any shells for their guns. The SLA detachment still in Jaffna Fort, 3km away, was equipped with three 120mm mortars, but the Indians and Sri Lankans did not have any common reference grids. The 10 AOP's single Chetak was dispatched over the area to act as a relay between the Para Commando Forward Artillery Observer, who had taken up a position on a roof, and the Sri Lankan engineers who were operating the mortars, until they could coordinate directly together.

The bombardment proved highly effective and inflicted heavy casualties on the Tigers, but also to civilians in the area, while one shell accidentally landed in an Indian-occupied house and killed two Para Commandos. The mortars continued to fire until their ammunition supply was exhausted. Only three bombs per tube were kept back, to be used only if the situation became desperate.

In mid-afternoon, the Para Commandos reduced their defensive perimeter by abandoning one of the houses, while the Tigers, because of their heavy casualties, gave up attempts to launch all-out assaults and limited themselves to constant harassing fire. The besieged troops were relieved when night fell because of the militants' reluctance to engage in night combat, and thus did not suffer further losses until the arrival of ground forces tasked to rescue them. Nonetheless, Major Singh's command had suffered six KIA (killed in action) and 14 WIA (wounded in action) since the beginning of the raid.[20]



The opening moves of the Indian offensive against Jaffna, with major prongs of the ground advance, during the period 10–16 October 1987. (Map by Tom Cooper)



Tigers with the bodies of IPKF troops ambushed minutes before: seeking revenge for Prabhakaran's 'boys', the insurgents showed no mercy, shooting on the spot any badly injured Indians. (Rohan Gunaratna Collection)

Embattled Rescue Force

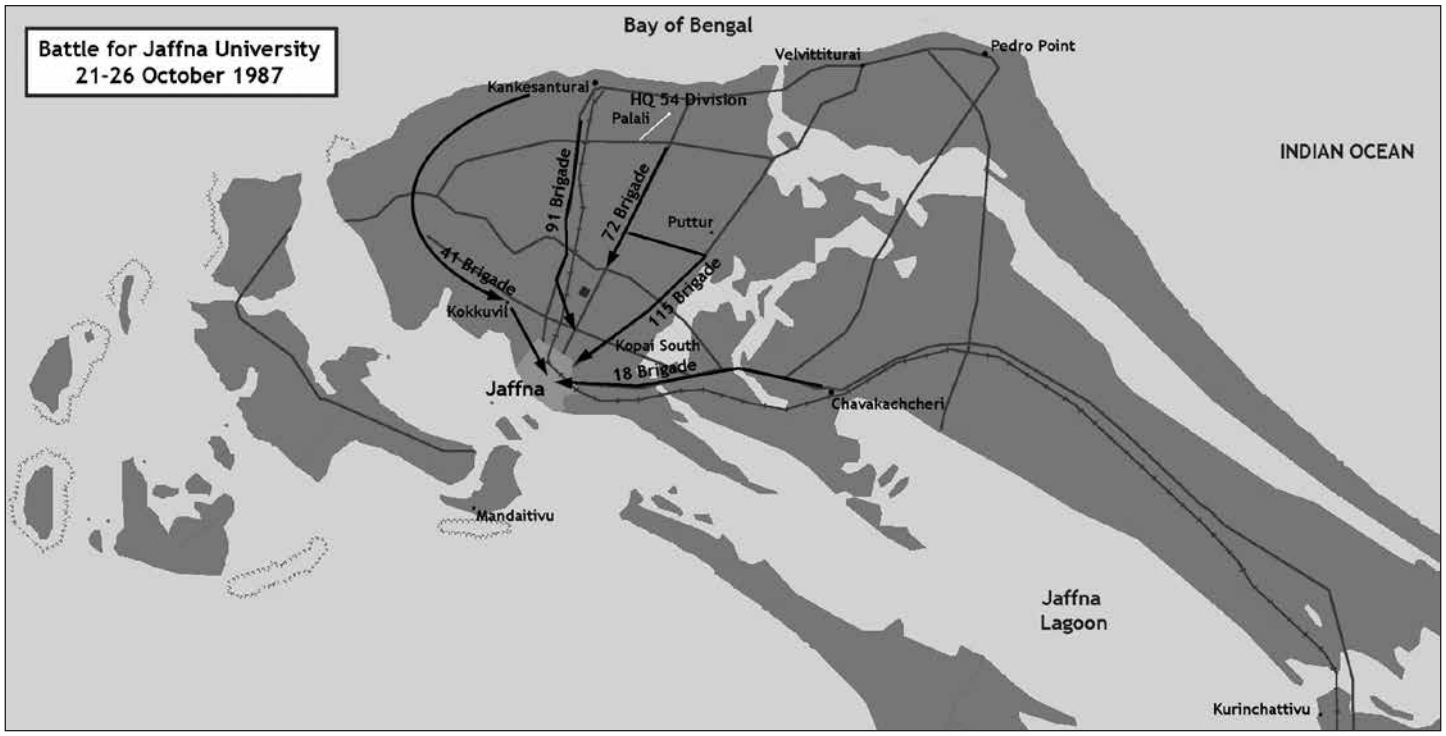
While the Para Commandos and the 13 Sikh LI were preparing for their air assault, the 4/5 Gorkhas began to advance from Palali AB at 6:30 P.M. on 11 October, following the main road leading to Jaffna town and acting as the vanguard of 72nd Infantry Brigade. The brigade mission was to link up with the airborne forces and invest the city, while acting as one of the main prongs of the IPKF's concentric offensive. However, the Gorkha battalion had to engage in sustained fighting 4km from its point of departure. Its soldiers assaulted a house used as a firing position by the militants, and also cleared the village of Punnalaikadduvan, searching one house after the other, and suffering one KIA and three WIA inflicted by a landmine while doing so.

By 4:00 A.M. on 12 October, 4/5 Gorkhas had barely reached a crossroads on the outskirts of Urelu, 6km from Jaffna city centre, where fierce Tiger resistance tied it down. Meanwhile, with no hope of further air insertion on the university's sports ground, 13 Sikh LI's C and D Companies and the battalion HQ were sent to reinforce the Gorkhas, and reached Urelu at dawn. Because of the communication failures that characterised the airborne operation, Lieutenant Colonel Sethi, CO of the 13 Sikh LI, believed its isolated platoon had not landed on the university LZ, but on the secondary one, located in the Kondavil area. Thus, while the Gorkhas continued to be tied down at the Urelu crossroads, he advanced in heavy rain with his unit in a 'wild goose hunt' toward the secondary LZ. Just 1km from the LZ, his command fell into a maze of enemy fire positions, as described by Havaldar (Sergeant) Kuldeep Singh: "We were pinned down by snipers firing at us from all sides. Five men from our unit died. It was very difficult. We have not been trained for this kind of battle."[21]

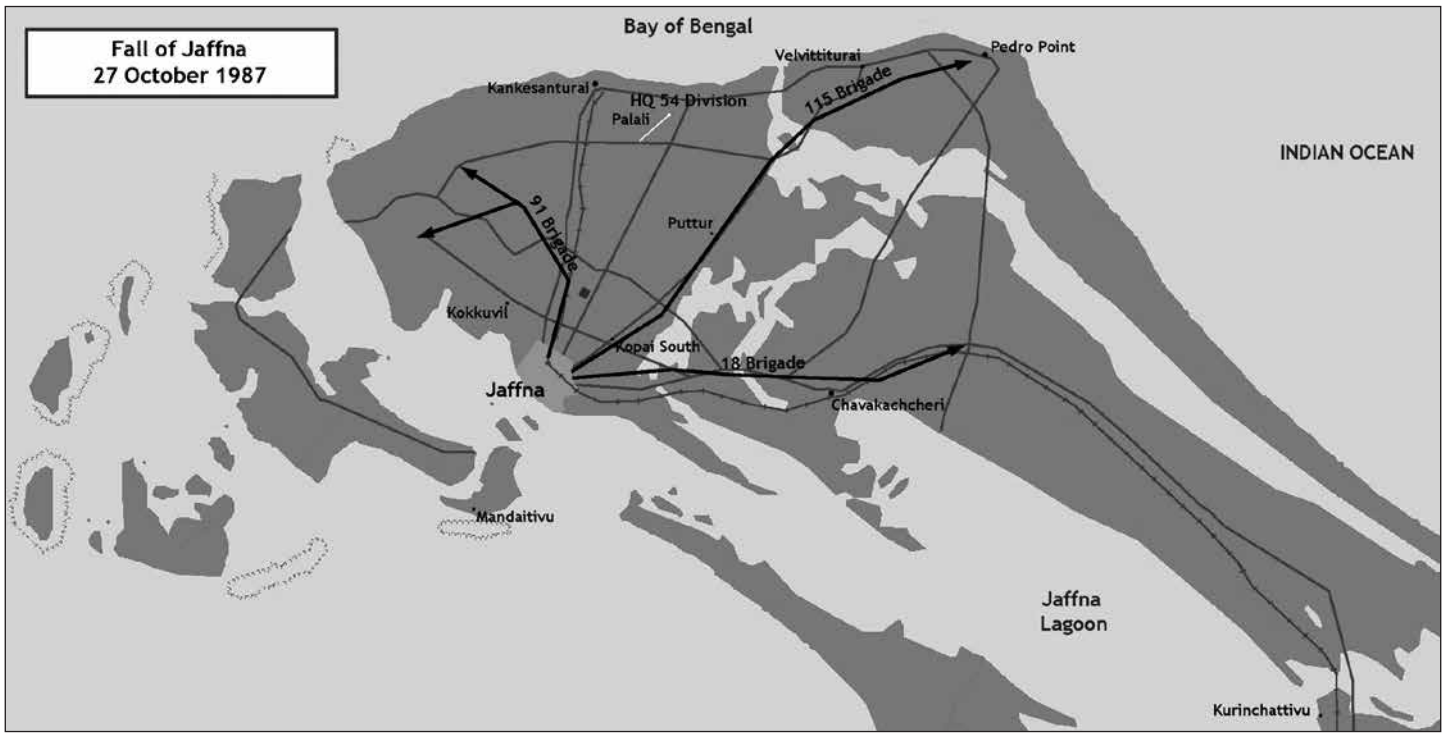
The 13 Sikh LI was indeed in a critical situation, as aside from five KIA, another 27 were wounded in the deadly firefight. The two 72nd Infantry Brigade battalions remained immobilised during the following hours. Fortunately for the Indians, the remaining companies of 13 Sikh LI and, crucially, two of 65th Armoured Regiment's T-72 tanks landed at Palali AB that day. A relief column was hastily put together, mixing the three T-72s with the bulk of 10th Para Commando and the 13 Sikh LI contingent.[22] The briefing given to Major Anil Kaul, the tank troop commander, was in itself a testimony to the prevailing confusion:

> The road to Jaffna had been cleared of all opposition – however, I was to be careful of improvised explosive devices, snipers sitting on trees or high buildings along the road, and medium machine guns operating from hides. Otherwise, the road was clear.'[23]

The column left Palali AB at 10:30 A.M., and arrived at Urelu without any hindrance an hour later. The tanks immediately made



The second phase of the Indian Army's assault on Jaffna, between 21 and 26 October 1987. (Map by Tom Cooper)



The final phase of the battle, on 27 October 1987. (Map by Tom Cooper)

their presence felt by killing a sniper located on the roof of a temple. The T-72 troop, with one Gorkha company and the Para Commandos, began to advance toward Kondavil at 3:00 P.M. to extricate the embattled 13 Sikh LI's C and D Companies. To avoid the heavily mined and well-defended roads, the *ad hoc* force moved along the railway tracks instead, wrong-footing the Tigers. Even so, the column soon met with significant resistance, and the tanks had to fire their 125mm main guns to neutralise enemy positions and allow the infantry to progress, as described by Major Kaul, the tank troop's commander:

> [We] were fired at by what seemed a medium machine gun from a beautiful villa flying a white flag. The effect of our fire on the villa was devastating, as I used the armour-piercing ammunition to make a hole in the wall of the house and then used a high explosive round to blow it up. It was heart-rending to see such a pretty house and possibly its occupants go up in flames. The second time we were fired at was from a water tank next to a bombed-out railway station. Once again the main gun was used with telling effect to bring the water tank down and send its occupants to Valhalla.[24]

But the militants could also inflict telling blows of their own, and the civilians caught in the battle were undoubtedly suffering the most, as witnessed by the same tank officer:

Havildar (Sergeant), Sikh Regiment, IPKF, Trincomalee, 1989
Some of the most tradition-rich and decorated infantry units of the Indian Army are the Sikh regiments, composed exclusively of soldiers of the Sikh ethnic group, recruited mainly in the Indian federal states of Jat and Punjab. This veteran of the 1971 Indo-Pakistani War is shown wearing the standard green uniform of the Indian Army, issued in the late 1980s. Unlike other units, the Sikhs were permitted to grow a beard and wear the turban over their long hair, as was their tradition: the turban was replaced by a regular beret only for soldiers who decided to cut their hair. A colourful red badge (used by the Indian Army whenever serving abroad) is worn on the shoulder, and decorations – including the High Altitude Service Medal, the Sena Medal and the Siachen Glacier Medal – on the left breast pocket. Inset are the Sikh Regiment cap badge and shoulder title. (Artwork by Anderson Subtil)

LTTE Guerrilla, Sri Lanka, 1987
This young female guerrilla – no more than 17 or 18 years of age – wears long braids and civilian clothes, as was widespread within the ranks of the LTTE. This was done so that in case she was killed, the arms and other equipment could be collected and she would then appear to be a civilian victim – an old and effective insurgent tactic. The rucksack seems to have been handmade, but the Type 56 chest rig (colloquially 'Chicom') was of Chinese origin. The rifle was a Norinco-made Type 56 – a Chinese clone of the Kalashnikov AK-47. Inset is the LTTE flag. (Artworks by Anderson Subtil)

Gurkha soldier, 11 Gorkha Rifles, IPKF, 1990
The Gurkhas of Nepal are famous for their two century-long connection with the British Army. It is much less-well known that many more Gurkhas have served in 39 battalions in seven regiments of the Indian Army, including one with the Frontier Force, and that in Indian service they are known as 'Gorkhas'. This trooper of the 11th Gorkha Rifles is easily identified by the metal insignia attached to his green beret, something inherited from colonial times. He is shown wearing the typical Indian Army combat uniform of the late 1980s, which drew many features from the British military, including the canvas belt (copy of the 1937 British Army model). While not similar to the British pattern, the camouflage fabric is coloured in the pattern of overlapping palm leaves, known as Disruptive Pattern Material (DPM). His weapon is the 1A1 7.62mm rifle: a modified version of the L1A1 self-loading rifle manufactured by the state-owned Ordnance Factory Trichy. Worn tight to the waist is the menacing Kukri – a traditional blade in Nepal. (Artwork by Anderson Subtil)

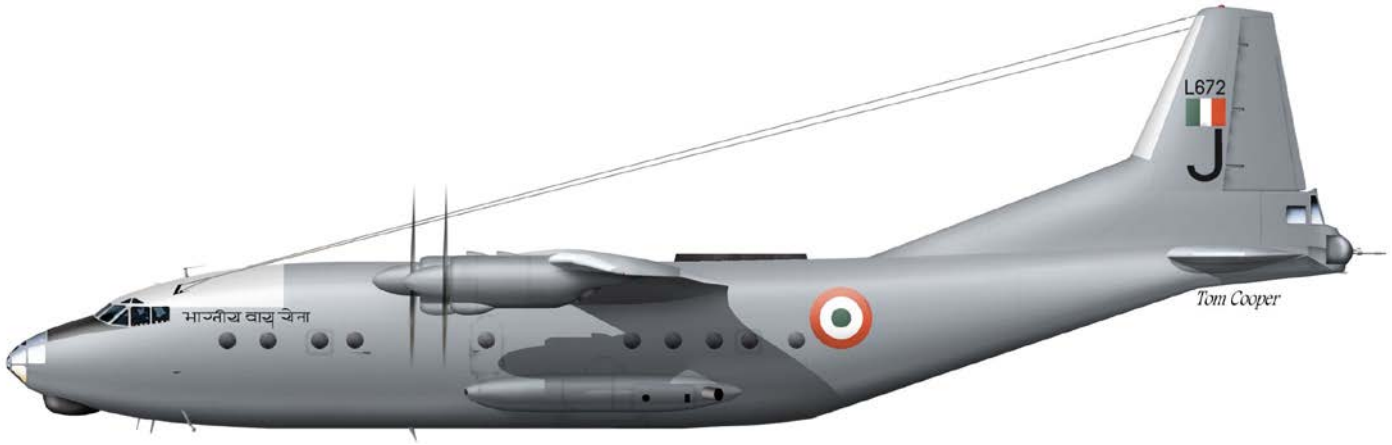
Paratrooper, Parachute Regiment, Jaffna, 1988
Five battalions of the Indian Army's Parachute Regiment were deployed during Operation *Pawan*. They lived up to their reputation as elite troops – earned when they were part of the British Indian Army. Like many other airborne troops around the world, Indian paratroopers also wear a red beret – which the Sikhs may replace with a turban in the same colour. The uniform is slightly different than that shown in the illustration of the Gorkha soldier, but seems to be of the same origin. His weapon was the Polish-made AKS (which the Indian Army purchased for use by its elite troops in Sri Lanka) and Chinese-style chest rig ammo pouches contain 7.62x39mm calibre ammunition. Inset are the Indian Army parachute wings and Para Commando insignia. (Artworks by Anderson Subtil)

Following extensive testing, the Indian Army purchased a small number of T-72s from the USSR in 1984, and then launched domestic production under licence a year later, eventually acquiring around 650. The Indian Army was in the process of deploying a troop of three of these from the 65th Armoured Regiment by Il-76 transports of the IAF to Palali AB when the IPKF launched its assault on Jaffna University between 10 and 12 October 1987. The first of these went into action almost as soon as it was on the ground. As far as is known, this tank wore no side-skirts and seems to have received no camouflage pattern or any of the insignia applied on T-72s of that unit around the same time. (Artwork by David Bocquelet)

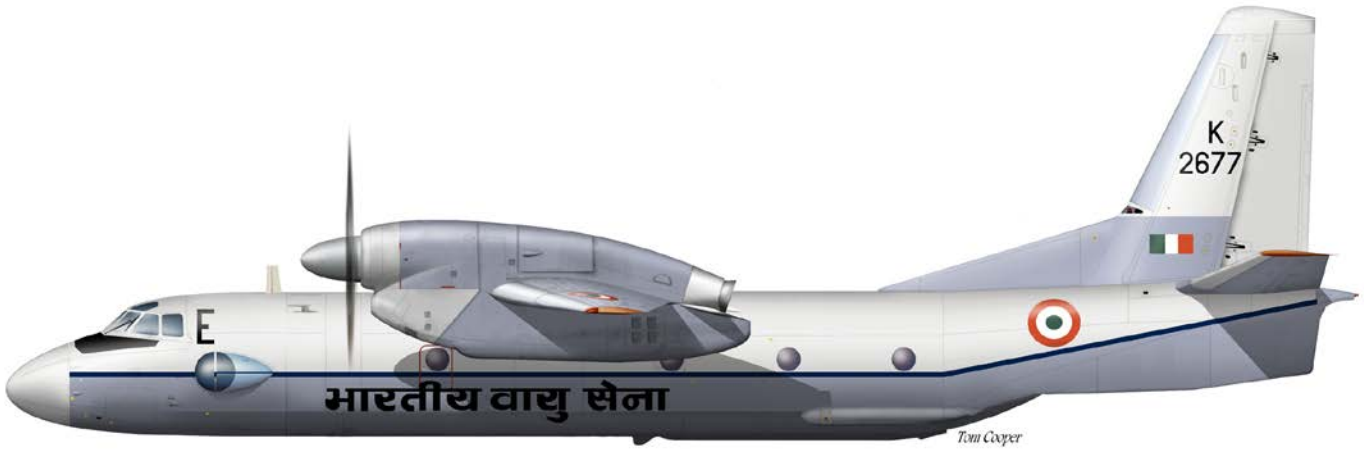
The other two T-72s from the 65th Armoured Regiment flown to Palali AB arrived on 12 October 1987 already wearing a camouflage pattern consisting of sand colour applied on top of their overall olive green livery. Both came together with their side-skirts, and the tactical insignia of their regiment, '240', applied in white on a black quadrant on the front right fender. The three T-72s were subsequently assigned to the relief column sent to break through to the troops besieged at the university campus, including the bulk of 10 Para Commando and 13 Sikh Light Infantry. Thanks to a 125mm smooth-bore gun and – for its generation – excellent armour on the front of the hull and turret, the T-72 was the most powerful armoured fighting vehicle ever deployed in Sri Lanka before 1990. (Artwork by David Bocquelet)

Hard on the heels of the three T-72s, the IAF's Il-76MDs flew in at least two troops of BMP-1 infantry fighting vehicles. All of these wore a similar camouflage pattern consisting of sand colour applied on top of overall olive green, but nothing is known about any kind of unit insignia that they wore. Two were quickly lost to mines during vicious fighting against the LTTE, but they provided valuable fire-support to 16 Sikh LI and 19 Rajuptana Rifles as these fought to link-up with 1 Mahar, and in the subsequent expulsion of the LTTE from the university campus between 20 and 24 October 1987. (Artwork by David Bocquelet)

The IAF acquired a total of 24 Il-76MD *Gajraj* transports in the mid-1980s, which were assigned to No. 25 and No. 44 Squadrons. Both units became heavily involved in running the air bridge to Sri Lanka in support of the IPKF. Their aircraft brought the three T-72 MBTs of the Indian Army to Palali AB in October 1987. All had the top surfaces of their fuselage painted in white, a thin blue cheat line, and wings, horizontal stabilisers and lower portions of the fuselage painted in grey. Their introduction to service marked the start of the application of the service title on IAF transports: in Hindu on the port/left and in English on the right/starboard side of the fuselage. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



The urgency to deploy the IPKF was such that No. 25 and No. 44 Squadrons even deployed the last few remaining An-12s during this operation. This was an even bigger achievement considering the Antonov works at Kiev discontinued even the production of spares for this type in the early 1980s: by 1987, the IAF's An-12s required the support of No. 3 Base Repair Depot at Chandigarh for maintenance purposes. All the Indian An-12s were painted in grey overall, with the cockpit roof in white. In addition to their registrations – applied above the fin flash – they were further marked with big black codes (apparently A–Z). As far as is known, service titles were applied only on this example (from No. 25 Squadron) and a few others. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



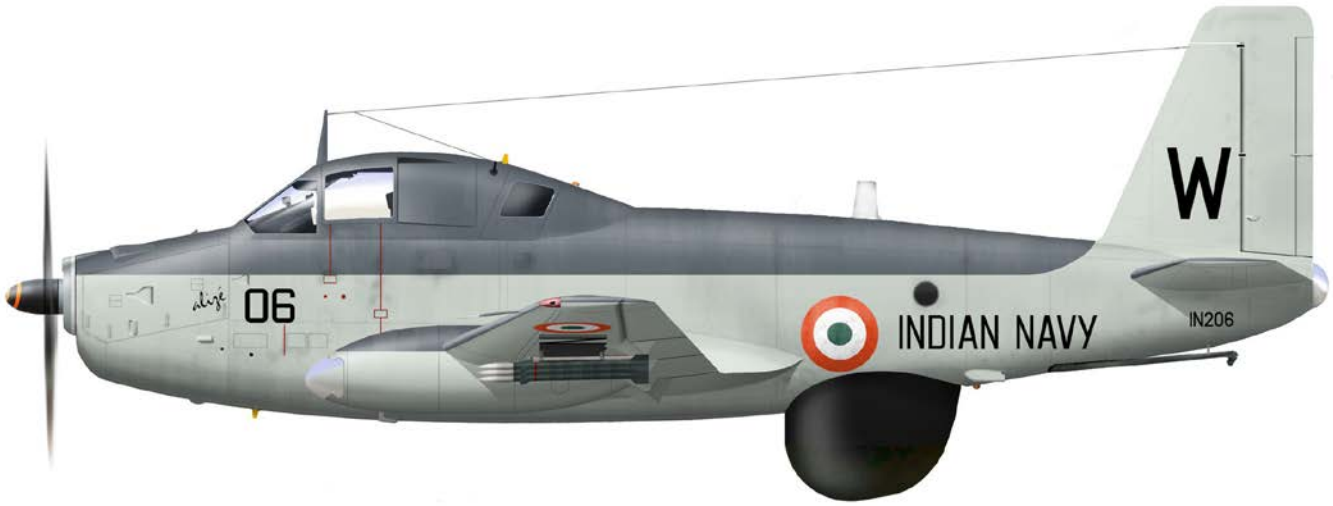
The big fleet of 95 An-32 *Sutlejs* acquired by the IAF in the mid-1980s and operated by Nos. 12, 33, 43, 48, and 49 Squadrons (and the Paratroop Training School) wore essentially the same livery as Il-76s. Many aircraft involved in deploying the IPKF to Sri Lanka still lacked their service titles, but these became common for all the *Sutlejs* by 1990. Note the similar combination of the registration (K2677) applied on the fin with a letter applied behind the cockpit (E), as on the An-12s. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)

By 1987, the IAF included a fleet of well over 100 Mi-8 *Ranas*. Nearly all were painted as shown here, in blue-grey and dark green on top surfaces and sides, and light grey on undersurfaces. Five-digit registrations (always including the prefix Z) were applied in black on the boom. National markings were applied in the form of roundels on the rear of the cabin and the national flag on the boom. Note the service title applied in English on both sides of the upper fuselage – apparently a practice applied only on Mi-8s deployed to Sri Lanka. Standard armament consisted of two UB-16-57 or UB-32-57 pods for 57mm unguided rockets, but was frequently enhanced through the addition of a flight technician-served machine gun fired out of the cabin windows. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)

The IAF's Mi-17 *Prataps* of the late 1980s were generally painted green overall. As the air force received intelligence about the LTTE acquiring MANPADS, several examples deployed to Sri Lanka also received box-like exhaust diffusers. Service titles were applied in English on both sides of the upper fuselage, and registrations (always starting with prefix Z) in black on the boom. Although this reasonably powerful and very reliable helicopter could carry much more, standard armament consisted of two UB-32-57 rocket pods. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)

As of 1987, only one IAF squadron – No. 125 Helicopter Unit – was equipped with Mi-25s. Its mounts thus saw intensive combat deployment during the three years of the Indian military intervention in Sri Lanka. Their camouflage pattern was the same as applied on nearly all Mi-25s exported worldwide since 1979: it consisted of yellow sand and dark green applied following a standardised camouflage pattern. Indian additions included a small registration on the fin, and replacement of the Russian word '*opasno*' with its English equivalent 'danger'. The usual weapon configuration included two, and rarely four, UB-32-57 rocket pods, frequently combined with a pair of drop tanks. While several of the IAF's Mi-25s were hit by LTTE ground fire – at least one losing an engine as a result – none were shot down. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)

IAF *Shamshers* (Jaguar International) did not became directly involved in combat operations against the LTTE, but did fly reconnaissance sorties equipped with the huge EMI IRLS reconnaissance pod. This 6-metre long, 560kg container included one Vinten camera viewing forward, a bank of four Vinten cameras viewing to the side and a big infra-red line scanner (IRLS) in its rear half. The example illustrated here was assigned to No. 5 'The Tuskers' Squadron, as indicated by their small unit insignia (a black elephant) applied on its nose. Equipped with aircraft from the first batch of 40 British-manufactured examples, this was the first unit to convert to the type. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



The Breguet Br.1050 Alizé were French-made, carrier-based anti-submarine warfare aircraft, developed in the 1950s and equipped with a Thomson-CSF DRAA-2B search radar, installed in a retractable radome under the rear fuselage. Throughout their service they retained their original camouflage pattern consisting of extra dark sea grey on top surfaces, and sky S on undersurfaces and sides. The INAS 310 'Cobras' flew 12 aircraft (reinforced by two spare aircraft from French Navy stocks) for reconnaissance purposes during the liberation of Portuguese-controlled Goa in 1961, and for anti-submarine purposes during the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971, when one was shot down by a Pakistani interceptor. The survivors were relegated to shore-based patrols in 1987, but still deployed in support of the IPKF, when they proved highly successful in combating speedboats hauling supplies for the LTTE. For such operations, the type was initially armed with up to six (three per wing) 127mm unguided rockets, but these were quickly replaced by much more convenient Matra F4 pods. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)

The Indian Navy acquired a total of 16 British Aerospace Sea Harrier FRS Mk.51s and two T Mk.60 two-seat conversion trainers between 1979 and 1985 (an additional 12 followed at a later date). All originally wore this camouflage consisting of extra dark sea grey on top surfaces and sides, and off-white on undersurfaces. They were operated by INAS 300 from the carrier INS *Vikrant* in 1989–1990, and had British-made Sea Eagle anti-ship and French-made Magic Mk.I air-to-air missiles as their primary armament. Indian Sea Harriers were usually armed with two 30mm ADEN cannon (installed in two pods under the fuselage, with 130 rounds each) and up to two Matra F4 pods for 14 unguided 68mm calibre rockets: a weapon that proved highly effective. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)

INS *Vikrant*, the first carrier of the Indian Navy, seen in 1984 with Sea Harriers already embarked, but prior to the ski-jump ramp being installed on the bow, and still carrying older Supermarine Sea Hawks, Breguet Alizés and more modern Westland Sea King helicopters. (Arun Prakash)

INS *Godavari* off the port of New York City during the International Fleet Review in July 1986. (via Wikicommons)

Armed with FN FALs, paratroopers of the Indian Army about to embark on one of the IAF's Il-76MD transports for the flight to Sri Lanka. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Troops of the 41st Infantry Brigade, Indian Army, disembarking from a BMP-1 outside Jaffna in October 1987. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

An An-32 of the IAF loading supplies prior to a flight to Sri Lanka. Operated under the local designation *Sutlej*, they played a crucial role in keeping the IPKF contingent resupplied. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

A close-up view of the Mi-8 with registration Z1686. Note the two UB-16-57 rocket pods in the foreground. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Loaded with FAB-250-270 general-purpose bombs, this Mi-25 of No. 125 HU is parked on a taxiway at Palali AB, waiting for its next combat sortie, in early 1988. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

A HAL Chetak – an Alouette III manufactured under licence in India – of the Indian Army. As of 1987 all of these were painted in dark green overall, had three-digit registrations prefixed by Z and service titles applied in white on the boom (for example: Z371) and the title 'Chetak' applied on the front fuselage. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Map of Sri Lanka with major army bases, air bases, and naval bases of the Sri Lankan military of the late 1980s. (Map by Tom Cooper)

> Suddenly Tamil villagers appeared in the middle of a cultivated field. As we looked past them, wondering what they were up to, a burst of medium machine-gun fire greeted us from behind the villagers and eight Gurkha soldiers went down, never to rise again. The response was furious from our side, and I say this with no qualms. The firing from our side only stopped when each militant lay stretched out. In the bargain some innocent men, women and children were unfortunately killed.[25]

The mixed force eventually linked with the 13 Sikh LI around 7:30 P.M., combining with it and advancing toward Major Sheonan Singh's beleaguered men near the university. Direct radio contact was established between the two forces, and by 4:00 A.M. on 13 October, they too had joined together. Two hours later, the motley force began its journey back to Palali. The return leg proved as harrowing as the advance: by dawn, the Tigers had reorganised themselves and established new, well-camouflaged firing positions along the railway line. This time, the militants avoided uncovering themselves by engaging the enemy vanguard, where the T-72s were, waiting for the opportunity to hit the much more vulnerable middle and tail of the column. The situation became critical on several occasions, and the Indians had to resort to intense 81mm mortar fire to extricate themselves, and request the support of a SLAF Bell 212 gunship, which strafed and launched its rockets on a temple used as a fighting position by the Tigers. Nonetheless, losses were heavy, and included Lieutenant Colonel Bawa, who was mortally injured. After several hours of fighting, the whole force managed to break through and reached Palali AB by mid-afternoon, thus ending the disastrous university raid episode.[26]

Battle for Jaffna University

The whole episode actually came as a shock for both sides, because of the viciousness of the fighting and the determination of the combatants. On the one hand, this shattered any Indian illusion about dispersing some 'ill-trained and ill-organised' insurgents. Indeed, the conclusion of Major Sheonan Singh about the mettle of his opponents, while reporting about his desperate battle in the university area, was damning: "You still believe that these lungi-wearing Tamils know nothing about fighting. It doesn't matter what he is wearing, he is a far superior soldier to us."[27]

Yet the sheer determination of the Indian troops, and notably their ability to keep their cohesion and continue to manoeuvre, usually by attempting to flank enemy positions, despite suffering severe casualties, also came as a surprise for the LTTE. Indeed, according to Lieutenant General S.C. Sardeshpande, CO of 54th Air Assault Division in 1988 and thereafter Chief of Staff of the IPKF, what characterised the Indian troops was their endurance and grim determination:

> Jawans [troopers] were stolid, steady, phlegmatic, enduring, capable of taking [an] enormous beating and, over time, giving it back in equal measure; but lacked guile and cunning. The Infantry's rigidity, conservatism, wariness, long time required for its preparation, all proved to be assets, as these very attributes helped it to remain steady, firm, determined to stay put, and fight to the very last.[28]

This, with their willingness to fight to the end when caught in a

Almost legendary for their performances in the Second World War and after, the troops of the 5th Gorkha Regiment of the Indian Army, commanded by Colonel I.B.S. Bawa, proved their ferocity under the most difficult circumstances during the battle for Jaffna. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

The evacuation of an injured Indian Para Commando by a Mi-8 helicopter of the IAF. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

desperate situation, as amply shown by the 13 Sikh LI's isolated platoon, was a clear sign that this time the Tigers had bitten off more than they could chew. Major Kaul witnessed from his tank cupola a grim example of the kind of combatants the militants were up against:

> [A] Gurkha soldier who suddenly spotted an LTTE cadre threw his rifle on my tank and ran after the fleeing militant, unleashing his khukri (traditional sword) at the same time. As we turned the corner, I saw both adversaries so close that they could possibly smell each other's sweat. In a fraction of a second, the khukri had done its job. The decapitated body of the militant went through its death throes as the Gurkha wiped his khukri with the slain militant's lungi, picked up his rifle [the militant's AK-47] and went on back to marching with the column as if nothing had happened.[29]

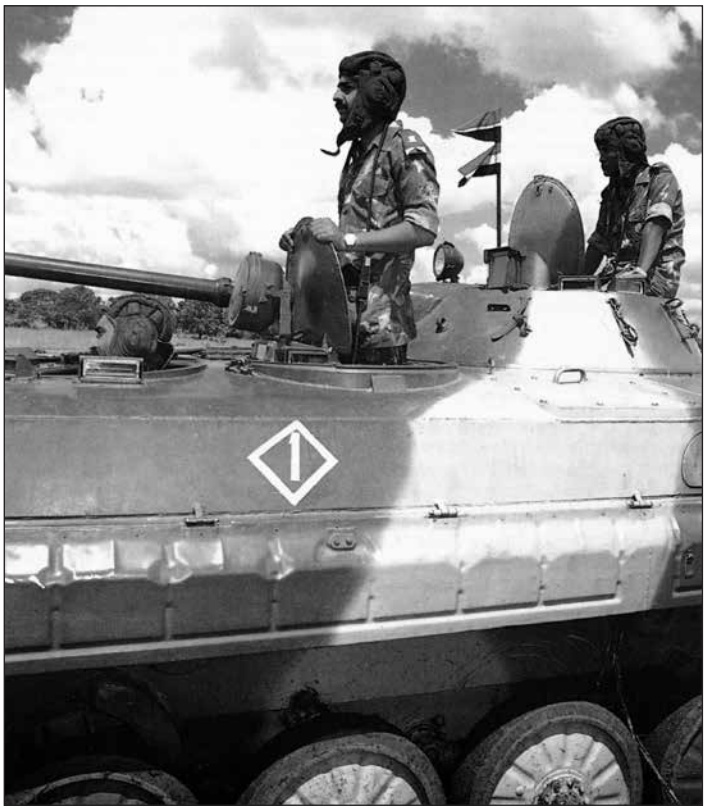
Fall of Jaffna

Despite the setback suffered during the university raid, the Indian troops continued their attempts to break through the Tigers' defensive lines. While 72nd Infantry Brigade was still clearing the main Palali-Jaffna road but remained blocked by heavy enemy resistance in the outskirts of Kokkuvil, 18th Infantry Brigade's two battalions continued to advance along separate axes from the east of the town, and its third battalion, the 18th Garwhal Rifles, arrived on 18 October. The 12th Grenadiers were moving from Navatkuli along the coastal road, and the 4th Mahar were still tied down in the heavily defended Kopai area against very fierce enemy resistance. The 115th Infantry Brigade was rushed to the scene straight after its induction at Palali, and its first elements arrived in Kopai during the night of 19-20 October, forcing the Tigers to withdraw soon after.[30] The insurgents were not immune from the fog of war either, as recalled by one of the female militants who took part in the Kopai fighting:

> Under the command of Theeba, we were the only female unit at this skirmish although we were yet to engage in battle … We were ordered by a male unit leader to head down one of the roads to prevent any possible enemy advance from that direction, although no movement had been detected there as yet. … Suddenly the man at the front of the line stopped in his tracks and crouched down. I was third in line, so I did the same. The whole line had now come to a grinding halt behind us. Only then did I see them – where the lane took a sharp bend, just 100 metres ahead of us: there were two stationary tanks and, beside them, about 10 Indian soldiers. They were too well camouflaged for us to have seen them sooner. That very moment, the soldiers laid eyes on us. "Surrender!" one of them shouted, and immediately the others cocked their rifles and held them in position, aiming at us.
>
> I looked for the leader of the line for orders but I quickly realised he had turned around and started running in the direction we had just come from. Suddenly everyone was running after him in a mad dash. The soldiers did not follow us, perhaps uncertain of what our strength was. But no sooner had we reached the junction, completely out of breath, than we were confronted by a heavily built man sporting a massive moustache on a bicycle. Saraa, the local … area Tiger commander, barefooted in a dirty sarong and shirt, began yelling abuse while rolling his large eyes at us. "Fucking bastards! What damn dickhead sent you that way? Where did your brains disappear – or don't you fuckers have one? It was anyone's fucking guess that soldiers are advancing from the northern front! Knowing the facts, only a donkey would walk down that way!" Saraa paused and took a deep breath. "Now, two by two take positions along this road. Bloody idiots! You are more useful dead!"[31]

Meanwhile, 91st Infantry Brigade had also initiated a two-pronged advance from Kankesanthurai, with 8 Mahar making a flanking move along the western coast of the Peninsula and 5 Madras advancing straight toward Jaffna along the Kankesanthurai-Mallakam-Chunakam-Maruthamadam-Jaffna axis. While by dawn of 18 October, 5 Madras had successfully secured Tekkipallai, Mallakam and Chunakam, 8 Mahar was heavily taxed.[32]

On 15 October, D Company, 8 Mahar, was ordered to secure and hold the village of Anai-Kottai, which was to be uses as a launching pad for 41st Infantry Brigade's advance once it had completed its induction, scheduled for the following day. The 65-strong company, under Major P. S. Ganapathy, advanced toward the village in the early hours of 16 October, arriving at 6:45 A.M. and investing the village, where it had to deal with several LTTE strongpoints. Once the threat was identified, the Tigers rushed several sections to Anai-Kottai, and by early evening they had surrounded D Company. Major Ganapathy had ordered his men to entrench themselves, and during the next two days the isolated Indian soldiers were under constant harassing fire from an estimated 150–200 Tigers, having to repulse several attacks, sometimes at very close range. Instrumental to the survival of D Company was the availability of mortar support from neighbouring units and the successful infiltration of an Indian patrol that provided the besieged force with badly needed ammunitions during the night of 16-17 October, as well as a Chetak airdrop of ammunition on



A BMP-1 supporting the 41st Infantry Brigade outside Jaffna in October 1987. The unit lost two such infantry fighting vehicles to LTTE-laid mines. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

18 October. It was only at 1:00 A.M. that the 5th Rajputana Rifles rescued the beleaguered unit – two days after schedule. By then, D Company had lost 11 KIA and 28 WIA, and inflicted an estimated 50 casualties on the militants. This was not the only heavy blow to fall on the unfortunate 8 Mahar during those crucial days. On 16 October, a convoy of four trucks of the battalion was ambushed near Vaddukodai, and the Tigers took 17 soldiers captive.[33]

The 41st Infantry Brigade had begun to arrive in Palali on 15 October, but the unit was plagued with difficulties. One of its three battalions, 5 Rajputana Rifles, arrived much later than the other two, but both of the latter were as badly understrength as those of the other brigades. Between them, 19 Rajputana Rifles and 16 Sikh LI could muster only 440 men. To add insult to injury, the brigade was destabilised by the arrival of a new CO on 15 October. Brigadier Manjit Singh not only came right in the middle of his command's induction, but began almost immediately to antagonise his own staff and the battalion's commanders, while showing more interest in promoting his own career.[34]

The Jaffna Hospital Tragedy

The 16 Sikh LI and 19 Rajputana Rifles, with the Brigade HQ, began their advance along the coastal road on 17 October, only to be engaged in vicious fighting a few kilometres from the city centre. By then the unit had already lost two BMP-1s destroyed by landmines. On 19 October, 41st Infantry Brigade was helped by 1 Mahar, which sallied out of Jaffna Fort and advanced northward, threatening to catch the militants facing the 41st Brigade in a pincer. In turn, during the following night, 16 Sikh LI, which had swiftly adapted to the Jaffna battle conditions by using very fluid infantry tactics, began to infiltrate the town and its first elements linked up with 1 Mahar early in the morning of 20 October. Once the connection with Jaffna Fort was re-established, 16 Sikh LI, 5 Rajputana Rifles and 19 Rajputana Rifles began to clear the town. By then, the main LTTE strongholds protecting Jaffna town in Kokkuvil, Urumpurai and Kopai had been overwhelmed by the other Indian brigades, and between 20 and 22 October all of these were in position to invest the city. On 24 October, 13 Sikh LI expelled the LTTE from Jaffna University after a series of fierce fire-fights.

At this stage, the LTTE leadership ordered the bulk of its militants to withdraw from the town and retreat southwards in small groups, leaving only small rearguards behind. Hence, the IPKF seizure of the town centre proved in the end much less bloody that the battles fought in its outskirts. From 25 October to early November, the Indian infantrymen methodically searched the whole town, largely unopposed. However, the Tigers won a major propaganda victory before their withdrawal. On 21 October, while advancing toward the railway station, soldiers from the 5 Rajputana Rifles were fired upon by militants entrenched in Jaffna Hospital. Ignoring that the Tigers had swiftly vacated the place, the Indians troopers assaulted the facility, killing at least 21 doctors and nurses, having taken no chance and blindly followed the standard house-clearing drill by throwing hand grenades in rooms before entering them.[35]

By 30 October, the slugging match for Jaffna had ended and both sides had suffered accordingly. Since 11 October, the IPKF had lost 319 KIA, including 43 officers, while another 919 were WIA. The Indians estimated enemy losses to be as many as 1,100 KIA, although the LTTE acknowledged the loss of a mere six fighters killed in action.[36]

Flying Crocodiles

Once Jaffna city itself was secured, IPKF forces initiated a new multi-pronged operation on 27 October with the 18th, 91st and 115th Infantry Brigades to secure the whole peninsula. Troops were

Indian Army troops manning a checkpoint outside Jaffna. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

One of the 'modalais' (Alligators), as the LTTE named IAF Mi-25s, undergoing some quick maintenance while being refuelled at Palali AB. Note the two UB-32-57 rocket pods under the winglet in the foreground. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

An armament technician of No. 109 HU reloading 57mm unguided rockets into the UB-16-57 pods of this helicopter. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

also landed by helicopter on the islands facing Jaffna, such as Kayts. However, this proved a mere mopping-up operation rather than a new bout of protracted fighting. Indeed, the Tigers withdrew from their positions as soon as they were confronted by determined attacks. One exception was Chavakcheri, a major LTTE stronghold that the movement tried to hold – and where an Indian battalion, the 10 Madras, had remained tied down and isolated for some time – but the town was still overwhelmed in a matter of days by the IPKF.

Aside from the obvious exhaustion and heavy losses suffered since 10 October, the Tigers were further enticed to give up attempts to meet the Indians head-on by their use of air strikes from 25 October. From 11 October, the Mi-8 contingent in Palali tripled in size until it included around 12 helicopters. These played a decisive role by flying as many as 90 sorties per day, resupplying infantry units, carrying troops or evacuating casualties. Altogether, up to 31 October, the Mi-8s flew nearly 790 missions, transporting 6,700 men and 570 tons of supplies.

By doing so, several helicopters were hit by small-arms fire, and the Indian airmen concluded that some escort was needed. Thus, on 19 October, No. 125 HU, 'The Gladiators', the first IAF unit to have received Mi-25 Hinds, was ordered to move a pair of gunships, dubbed '*Akbar*' (Crocodile) by the IAF, to Sulur. However, the Indians were reluctant to introduce such weapon systems in Sri Lanka, for political reasons, and it was only on 23 October that the two machines arrived under utmost secrecy at Palali AB. These were followed by another pair on 26 October.

Two days later, Indian commanders had overcome their hesitations, and the Mi-25s began to fly their first combat missions, targeting enemy supply dumps with their 12.7mm HMG and 57mm rockets. The gunships were used to interdict LTTE road traffic, as recalled by Squadron Leader Rajbir Singh, who led the detachment and flew such a mission on 26 October:[37]

> I got airborne in Mi-25 Z2554 with Flight Lieutenant Guru in the front cockpit for [a] search and destroy mission. The IPKF had declared [a] curfew and no vehicles were allowed to move at all. We sighted five vans at Jaffna Karaitivu causeway which were trying to flee on seeing us. They were blue in colour and matched the description of LTTE vehicles as given by Division Headquarters. Having identified them as LTTE vehicles, I asked Guru to fire at the vehicles [with the] front gun. Considering that it was his first ever live firing sortie, he performed very well and scored directs, putting those vehicles out of action.[38]

That day, one Mi-25 carrying a Para Commando section also attempted to raid a LTTE command post, but the operation was aborted because no suitable LZ could be found in the immediate vicinity of the target. From 26–31 October, the Hinds continued to fly intensively, mainly concentrating on providing close air support (CAS) for ground units, interdicting enemy road or boat traffic, or striking suspected enemy positions. While the four Mi-25 flight missions were few in comparison to the number of sorties flown by the Mi-8s, their firepower weighed heavily on the Tigers' morale. The Hinds also impeded their mobility, as they had to restrict their movements to night-time – their ability to swiftly concentrate fighters on specific points had previously been paramount in their ability to tackle Indian troop advances. Before long, the militants labelled the Hind '*modalai*' (Crocodile or Alligator in Tamil).[39]

CHAPTER 4
TIGERS' INSURGENCY

Despite its defeat in Jaffna, the LTTE remained determined to fight a protracted guerrilla war against the IPKF. In turn, the Indians adapted their own strategy to cope with the Tigers. In essence, New Delhi chose to implement the India Sri Lankan Accord as initially intended. The IPKF was to support the restoration of local administrations while the election of a new Provincial Council in charge of governing the merged Northeastern Province was to take place as soon as possible, with the involvement of as many Tamil political parties and movements as possible.

In the meantime, the IPKF was to isolate the LTTE by expelling it from inhabited areas. The Indians had no intention of annihilating the Tigers, but hoped that provided enough military pressure was applied, they could be forced to surrender their weapons and join the other Tamil movements in the political process. For that reason, parallel negotiation channels were more or less kept open virtually until the end of the IPKF presence in Sri Lanka.[1]

Ambitious Strategy

At first glance, the Indian counter-insurgency strategy was well thought out and realistic. Instead of committing the mistake of attempting to solve the problem by killing the insurgents to the last man, the Indians acknowledged the largely political nature of the conflict and geared themselves toward a long-term political solution that could be supported by the bulk of the Tamil population. However, the devil lay in the details.

One of the most damaging characteristics of the Indian involvement in Sri Lanka from the outset was the lack of overall coordination, especially in the crucial aspect of intelligence. RAW was playing its own game on the island and kept the IPKF in the dark about, to take one example, its ongoing negotiations with the insurgents.[2] Furthermore, the various intelligence agencies' assessments of the situation in Sri Lanka usually varied considerably, while the IPKF got only infrequent intelligence reports from the Intelligence Bureau, RAW and the High Commission intelligence assets. As a result, the military units had to virtually improvise their own intelligence-gathering capabilities, with limited results. This was made worse because SIGINT intercepts became less reliable once the Tigers began to switch their radio codes at an increased pace and to mix the use of radio communications with couriers.

For similar reasons, the Indians were also lacking in another crucial tool of counter-insurgency. Psychological warfare actions were largely uncoordinated and taken by ad hoc cells activated among Army units' headquarters. Hence, throughout the war, the Indian troops had to cope with an enemy owning a vastly superior capability in terms of both propaganda and intelligence-gathering.[3]

Tamil civilians remained as a whole rather reluctant to provide information about the Tigers. A number of people concluded that it would be unwise to betray the Tigers, who would be around in the long run, while this was less obvious in the case of the IPKF. Besides, the insurgents regularly assassinated civilians suspected of having

Despite the pitched battle for Jaffna, the commanders of the IPKF remained determined to fulfil the mandate of their contingent with a long-term political solution through expulsion of the LTTE from urban areas and the restoration of local administration. Indian troops also often went to great lengths to take care to provide basic supplies for the population. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

The HQ of the 'Civil Cell' of the IPKF in Jaffna was both a point of contact with the local population and a place to collect valuable intelligence from them. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

provided the IPKF with information. From mid-1988 on, the flow of information to IPKF intelligence officers almost dried up, while the LTTE's tight compartmentalisation and culture of secrecy remained a formidable obstacle.

The Indians were also well aware that the majority of the Tamil population remained sympathetic to the LTTE, which had successfully infiltrated most of the civilian committees that were the main interface between Indian military authorities and the local populations. Nonetheless, the Indian military invested heavily in reactivating the local administration and service providers, helping in re-establishing power and water supplies and reopening not only hospitals but also local banks. In the latter case, IAF helicopters were used to supply the local branches with banknotes. In May 1988, Major General S. C. Sardeshpande, CO of the 54th Air Assault Division and overall commander of the IPKF in the Jaffna Peninsula, was aware of LTTE popularity: "The majority of the people still support the LTTE. Our effort is to loosen that. Total eradication is not possible."[4]

There were also limits to what the IPKF could do because running the infrastructure and, even more so, increasing the living standards of the local population in Indian-occupied areas remained nominally the exclusive prerogative of the Sri Lankan government, which continued, for example, to pay the wages of civil servants. However, Colombo proved reluctant to fund large-scale development programmes in the Northern and Eastern provinces of the island, especially as it was engaged in a virtually life-or-death struggle against the JVP.[5]

A Fragmented War

In early 1988, new officers took over from the commanders who were in charge during the Jaffna battle, beginning on 6 January when Major General Harkirat Singh was replaced by Major General S.C. Sardesphande as CO of 54th Air Assault Division. On 29 February, it was the turn of Lieutenant General Depinder Singh to quit his position as Indian Army Southern Command – and thus IPKF – commander, with Lieutenant General A.K. Chatterjee taking over.

Between February and April 1988, the IPKF itself was heavily reinforced and reorganised. The already present 54th Air Assault Division and 36th Infantry Division became solely responsible for the Jaffna Peninsula and Trincomalee district respectively, while the 4th Infantry Division, inducted in February 1988, became responsible for the Vanni area. The 57th Mountain Division, inducted in April, took over the Batticaloa and Amparai districts. A side-effect of this reshuffle was that these four divisions were forced to act completely independently – and without much coordination with each other – in their respective areas of responsibility, especially as local conditions varied considerably. This eventually gave birth to virtually four distinct fronts in which separate dynamics were taking place.

A sizeable air component included Nos. 10, 26, 31, and 664 Army Aviation Flights, equipped with Cheetah light helicopters. Each of these units was attached to one divisional headquarters for CASEVAC, reconnaissance and liaison duties, although No. 31 Army Aviation Flight was also equipped with Ranjit machine-gun-armed helicopters and thus able to launch offensive missions. The IPKF relied immensely on the IAF Mi-8s. No. 109 HU supported forces engaged in Vanni and the Jaffna Peninsula, while No. 119 HU, inducted in Sri Lanka in February 1988, covered the Trincomalee and Batticaloa districts. The IPKF could rely on an average of nine Mi-8s available at any given time. Fire support continued to be provided mainly by No. 125 HU's Mi-25s, as well as a small number of ATGM-equipped Chetaks operated by No. 116 HU. The Mi-8s, armed with UB-57 rocket pods or 250kg bombs, were also engaged in strike missions if needed.[6] IPKF manpower peaked at the end of November 1988 at 54,802 personnel.[7]

Although the tactics used varied considerably from one divisional area of responsibility to another, the Indian infantry often suffered from a lack of tactical flexibility, partly due to a lack of communication devices, as the lowest infantry echelon equipped with a radio was a platoon. As the Tigers benefitted from better ground intelligence thanks to their networks of sympathisers, but also from better communications equipment – available to the section level – they were able to mass a superior number of fighters against small Indian army formations.[8] As a result, the Indian troops tended to find security in numbers and operated in platoon and even company strength. They also tended to move along the roads or the large tracks, making it easy for the insurgents to avoid them. According to Major V.P. Singh, the Indian soldiers were lacking in jungle fighting abilities: "The LTTE would always say that Indian troops moving through the jungles were [on a] par with a herd of elephants moving through bamboo!"[9]

At least a company initially occupied most of the Indian camps, thus reducing their numbers and the IPKF's ability to cover and control ground. Comparatively large-scale operations targeting LTTE camps and hideouts deep in the forests could turn into exercises in futility, as they were easy to avoid by the insurgents. The by then Lieutenant Colonel V. P. Singh described rather sarcastically such an operation in the Batticaloa district in 1989:

A HAL Cheetah light helicopter taking off from an IPKF forward base. A reconnaissance flight of a single Cheetah helicopter of the Indian Army – apparently an 'innocent overflight' – was enough to put the LTTE entrenched at the University Campus in Jaffna on alert in October 1987. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

My sources coughed up some interesting intelligence. In a camp bordering the Sinhalese area, 60 Tigers recruits were undergoing training with 10 instructors. … Elaborate, coloured maps were prepared (they looked very impressive and would have given the brightest a run for their money at the Staff College) and as the plan went through the wringer, additional troops were allocated. Artillery guns were positioned to provide support fire and Mi-25 attack helicopters were thrown in for good effect. Not just the GOC, but also the force commander of the IPKF would view Operation *Golden Katar*. As 2IC, I got myself a vantage point from where I could see the events unfold. I also had the mortar platoon deployed nearby.

The guns opened up and they must have spooked the daylights out of the wildlife in the surrounding area. The LTTE, having realised something was up, had melted away ages ago. Attack helicopters then buzzed the abandoned camp, adding their little contribution to the hullabaloo. The GOC and the force commander now decided to land there in a helicopter. Overzealous escort parties sprayed the jungle with gunfire just in case the LTTE had survived the initial onslaught. On hearing the gunfire, the approaching helicopters with the top brass took evasive action and scooted from there. The end result was a lot of jungle bashing and tons of shredded vegetation.[10]

However, over time, the Army paid greater attention to its soldiers' preparation before their induction in Sri Lanka. An increasing number of them thus followed three-month Tamil language courses and infantry battalions were sent to a new battle school in Madras to train them in counter-insurgency tactics before their deployment to the island. Some units tended to be much more efficient than others for this kind of warfare. It was noticeably the case for those that had been deployed for counter-insurgency duties in India itself. Hence, specific battalions such as the 4/1 Gorkha Rifles, 4 Assam, 5 Madras or 10 Para Commandos became renowned for their prowess. Besides, even if Indian Army officers described their infantry tactics as "just adequate", the Tigers nonetheless often found themselves beaten at their own game. For example, on 16 August 1989, a Gorkha patrol fell into an ambush, losing three of its number killed in action; the well-rehearsed reaction was so swift that by the end of the clash, the ambushers had lost six fighters. Eventually, overall LTTE and IPKF losses were more or less even during the whole conflict, each side giving roughly as good as it got.[11]

Table 3: IPKF Order of Battle mid-1988

Unit	Comment
IPKF HQ	Fort St George, Madras. CO Lieutenant General A.S. Kalkat,
54th Air Assault Division	Jaffna. CO Major General S.C. Sardeshpande. Between 16 and 20 infantry battalions on average
4th Infantry Division	Vanni. HQ in Vavuniya. CO Major General Gupta. 10–15 infantry battalions on average
36th Infantry Division	Trincomalee. CO Major General Jameel Mehmood. 6–9 infantry battalions on average
57th Mountain Division	Batticaloa, CO Major General T.P. Singh. 24th and 76th Infantry Brigades. 6–9 infantry battalions on average

Controlling the Jaffna Peninsula

Once Jaffna and the main towns in the peninsula had been taken, the 54th Air Assault Division lost no time in increasing cordon and search operations, with an emphasis on traditional LTTE powerbases, such as the Vadamarachchi area.

The first sweeps were unsophisticated in nature, with large numbers of troops flooding the targeted areas, while patrolling activities took place primarily along the main road axes. The Indian units were still unfamiliar with the maze of small tracks or secondary lanes connecting the different villages, which offered ample opportunity for the small Tiger groups to escape. A lack of Tamil-speaking troopers also made intelligence-gathering extremely difficult.

However, 54th Air Assault Division's COIN operations became much more fluid and sophisticated. They began to benefit from better intelligence, often provided by local militants from other movements such as TELO, who were more than willing to take revenge against the Tigers. These rivals mostly wore masks to remain anonymous and went with the Indian patrols, nodding their head to designate LTTE militants, thus gaining the nickname '*thalaiyardis*' (a person who nods his head). By the end of October, the IPKF had solved one of its more vexing problems: the lack of detailed maps. From 21 October, Canberras of No. 106 Squadron IAF had made several reconnaissance

The LTTE's SAMs

By the mid-1980s, the LTTE attempted to acquire MANPADS to reinforce its anti-aircraft capabilities, so far limited to 12.7mm HMGs – and had the means to do so as its own independent procurement network became active in 1985.

This became obvious the following year. Worried by intelligence warnings of possible Sri Lankan Tamil militant attacks on Indian soil, New Delhi ordered the Madras government to launch a crackdown on militant bases in Tamil Nadu. In turn, the Tamil Nadu police launched simultaneous raids on 8 November 1986, variously known as Operation *Tiger* or Operation *Disarm*, on as many as 30 of the militants' bases and hideouts. The police captured not only dozens of militants, but also large amounts of weapons, ammunition and transmission equipment. Furthermore, police officers who raided the house used by the LTTE leader himself found at least one Soviet-made 9K32 Strela 2 missile (ASCC/NATO codename 'SA-7 Grail'). Later, in August 1987, and before the war resumed, the Tigers surrendered another Strela 2 missile to the IPKF. Almost exactly a year later, on 1 August 1988, a captured LTTE militant gave away the location of another missile. The hiding place, in a house in Nallur, was immediately raided by Para Commandos carried by an Mi-8, and these unearthed a single – non-functioning – missile hidden there.

The Indian Air Force, which had initially not had been informed of the possible presence of a MANPADS threat by the Indian intelligence agencies, did not take the problem lightly. Its high command requested the RAW to convey a crystal clear message to the LTTE leadership that any shooting down of an IAF aircraft with a surface-to-air missile would cause the IAF to unleash its "full might" against the insurgents. While it remains unknown if the Tigers still had other Strelas in their arsenal, what is certain is not one IAF aircrew reported any missile launch up to the IPKF's withdrawal.[17]

With army units heavily depending on effective helicopter support, New Delhi was particularly sensitive about LTTE attempts to obtain MANPADS. As soon as it realised that the militants had acquired some, it launched a major operation at home, in Tamil Nadu, and then forwarded a very clear message to the insurgents on the island. Crews of IAF Mi-25s never reported even a single firing of any MANPADS for the rest of their deployment. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

flights over the peninsula, and their pictures were used to issue new and up-to-date maps, which replaced those dating from the 1930s in use previously.[12]

By December 1987, the Indian units had intensified their patrolling activities, operating in smaller numbers than previously. Specific areas were placed under curfew, while the Indian troops were also active during the night, either to patrol or lay ambushes. The cumulative effect of these measures was at first limited, as only small numbers of militants were killed or captured, but eventually it completely disrupted the LTTE's ability to operate in even moderate strength. At one point the average life expectancy of area leaders in charge of places such Jaffna or Vadamarachchi could be counted in weeks. A number of weapon caches were discovered in November and December. Niromi de Soyza, who was still in the peninsula with her female squad, described the effect of 54th Division's COIN campaign by the end of December:

> Our enemy, the Indian military, was now in full control of Jaffna Peninsula and it seemed they were everywhere. … We could no longer shelter in a safe haven for more than two or three nights – the soldiers always turned up in the end.[13]

The LTTE could no longer launch spectacular operations, having to limit itself to small-scale harassment actions such as mine-laying. However, its network of underground cells remained intact, and its influence over the population was as strong as ever. The bulk of the Tamil civilians were still reluctant to provide intelligence on the 'Boys' – as the militants were called – and continued to turn toward the clandestine LTTE tribunals to settle disputes. The insurgents also continued to levy taxes, noticeably on road traffic, and to be ruthless against those who acted against their instructions.[14] IPKF officers harboured no illusions in this regard, as explained by Brigadier General Manjit Singh, the widely unpopular CO of 41st Infantry Brigade:

> The LTTE still controls life here. If they want to enforce a strike, they can. If they want to restore normalcy, they can. Ninety-five per cent of the towns are with the LTTE. If I have to catch all the LTTE supporters, then I will have to arrest the whole population.[15]

Nonetheless, by early 1988, the Jaffna Peninsula was considered as secured and normal life had largely resumed. In Jaffna town itself, the 54th Air Assault Division had created an ad hoc command, the 'Town Commandant Jaffna', led by Brigadier General R.I.S. Kahlon, who had replaced the notoriously heavy-handed Brigadier General Manjit Singh. This included several CPRF companies and small numbers of engineers, doctors and various specialists. It proved highly successful in restoring basic services in the city. The popularity of this outfit was such that Major General Kahlon could move in the town alone in his jeep, unescorted, as the Tigers knew that any assassination attempt would devastate their image among the public. Even so, the 54th Air Assault Division took no chances and continued periodic large-scale search operations, such as *Viraat*, in April 1988.[16]

Troops of the IPKF embarking on a Mi-8 of the IAF for another raid in early 1988. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Once out of the helicopter, this squad of Indian Army troops rushes to establish a defensive perimeter around the landing zone, as another Mi-8/17 approaches to deploy more troops. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

The Vanni battleground

The Vanni, composed of the districts of Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu and Vavuniya, turned into a much more difficult theatre – and the main centre of gravity in the war once the bulk of the LTTE fighters had withdrawn there. Much of this area was covered by very dense, sometimes almost impenetrable, jungle. The population density was comparatively low while the road network was underdeveloped. The LTTE made the most of these features to develop a large number of camps well hidden in the jungle. While the bulk of these were relatively small and centred around a few shelters and cooking and sanitary areas, others were much larger and grew into sophisticated complexes. The latter were surrounded by sentry posts and firing positions hidden by the jungle but benefiting from clear fields of fire cut into the undergrowth. All the approaches were sown with mines and IEDs, including the small Johnny mines.

The insurgents dug trenches, bunkers and underground shelters to protect against enemy air strikes and artillery fire. The infamous One Four base, located near the coast in the Alampil area and used by the movement's leadership in 1989, included bunkers buried as deep as 10 metres underground. Aside from these defensive features, some of the camps also included firing ranges and obstacle courses, dispensaries, workshops and a cemetery. The insurgents dug wells to ensure a steady supply of water, but remained heavily dependent on outside help for food supplies, which had to be carried along jungle tracks by columns of militants. Such facilities remained virtually invisible from the air as in order to keep themselves hidden the Tigers never cut trees.[18]

The ever-present LTTE radio infrastructure continued to be an invaluable asset, allowing the movement's leadership to maintain a tight control over this network of camps and bases. When journalist Anita Pradap teased him about his weight gain during an interview in the aftermath of the IPKF withdrawal, Velupillai Prabhakaran stated:

> Actually, I haven't been on the run literally. I don't take part in the attacks anymore because my physical safety is of paramount importance. So I usually remain in well-fortified, underground bunkers directing the operations. I am like a spider at the centre of the web.[19]

Jungle bashing

From these bases, the insurgents launched constant harassment actions such as laying IEDs along the main roads crossing the Vanni. The Tigers also regularly ambushed road convoys, their main tactic being to target the head and the tail of the columns. As a result, the Indians not only had to launch countless clearing operations along the roads, but also had to escort the convoys, with helicopters providing top cover. Indian units covering the Vanni did not remain passive though. In October 1987, the 36th Infantry Division launched a

large-scale sweep of the Mullaittivu area, but with limited results as only six militants were killed. On 4 January 1988, a Para Commando detachment, supported by at least one of No. 109 HU's MI-25s and infantrymen of the 16 Garhwal Rifles, raided the same area. Something much bigger came at the end of the month when Operation *Vajra* was initiated in the same zone after RAW had provided intelligence about the LTTE leader's whereabouts.

Five battalions were brought in by air, later reinforced by another three battalions, and invested an area roughly 150km square, launching several airborne operations. At least six camps were seized, but Prabhakaran, as well as most of the insurgents present in the area, melted into the jungle and avoided the trap when *Vajra* ended in early February. It soon became clear that unless cornered or protecting a crucial facility, the Tigers' standard tactic was to avoid combat and withdraw. It nonetheless briefly looked like the Indian strategy of pressuring the insurgents back into the mainstream political arena was working when the LTTE announced on 28 February that it was willing to reopen talks. However, the resulting ceasefire held for only a few days.[20]

While similar but smaller sweeps followed in March, a massive effort, codenamed Operation *Trishul*, took place all over the Vanni in April 1988, intending to expel the LTTE – and to a lesser extent, the remnants of groups such as the PLOTE – from inhabited areas. Around 10,000 troops were involved in the offensive, which began on 6 April, and several sweeps deep into the jungle took place until early May, when the operation ended. Several large camps were captured and destroyed, with hundreds of weapons captured, but the militants remained as elusive as ever and Indian troops were fiercely opposed. On 20 April they attacked an LTTE base located only a dozen kilometres from Vavuniya and protected by tunnels and trenches, forcing the insurgents to withdraw and leave behind the bodies of 27 of their own. However, the IPKF's large-scale offensives ended in familiar fashion, with camps destroyed but the insurgents suffering only a small number of casualties because they avoided set-piece battles whenever possible. The Indians made massive use of heliborne troops with air cover provided by armed helicopters, and always covered their ground forces with mortar and artillery support. However, as IPKF units invariably withdrew once their sweep ended, the insurgents were free to reinvest the areas they had vacated at will.[21]

Checkmate

In May 1988, the Indian troops initiated a new large-scale sweep in the Alampil area. The insurgents attempted to hold one of their main camps, which triggered a fierce battle of several days from 23 May. During this battle, an Indian infantry company fell into a large-scale ambush and found itself surrounded until Mi-8s deployed a Para Commando rescue unit that forced the Tigers to withdraw. On 24 May, ground fire by insurgents heavily damaged a Chetak helicopter. However, by early June, the Indians had deployed nearly 2,000 additional troops and finally forced the insurgents to withdraw.[22]

By then, a decision had been made about the holding of provincial elections and the IPKF HQ launched Operation *Checkmate*, an all-out effort throughout the Vanni to further isolate and reduce the LTTE.[23] This was to be done by marginalising the insurgency politically and decimating its fighting forces so it would be unable to interfere with the elections. *Checkmate*, one of the largest offensives ever launched by the IPKF, comprised two phases: the first took place between 17 June and 17 July, and the second from 17 July to 15 September. Each phase included multiple smaller operations, most of which targeted the insurgents' jungle bases. While earlier operations had shown that reaching such objectives and fighting in such conditions was fraught with difficulty, it also gave the Indians a major advantage: they were free to deploy massive firepower without hindrance as the battlefields were devoid of any civilian presence. The bulk of the combat and transport helicopters available in Sri Lanka were mobilised to support *Checkmate*, and the Mi-8s alone flew at least 1,514 sorties during the operation's three months.[24]

The series of cordon and search operations began in the usual fashion and without any specific problems until 25 June. That day, troops searching for suspected enemy camps in the Nitikaikulam area – a maze of especially thick jungle crossed by numerous waterways – under Operation *Nesco* met with heavy insurgent resistance, initiating a battle that would last for several weeks. The Indians made the most of their superior mobility, rushing a battalion of Para Commandos by air as reinforcements by 1 July. These were followed by hundreds of other troops that poured into an area of 400 square kilometres, turning it into the centre of gravity of the whole *Checkmate* operation.

After a lull from mid-July, the IPKF struck again, firstly with Operation *Cockerel*, involving reinforcements from 54th Air Assault Division sealing the insurgents' escape roads from Nitikaikulam to the Kilinochchi area. Secondly, from 12 August, units such as the 1/1 Gorkha and the 10th Para Commando were also inducted around Nitikaikulam, creating a tight cordon surrounding the enemy bases, which were defended by an estimated 150 militants. Despite the difficult terrain, the Indian units, under the command of 7th Infantry Brigade headquarters, progressively tightened the noose until 23 August, when the size of the encircled area had shrunk to a mere square kilometre. The LTTE did not remain passive, however, and the following afternoon a group of Tigers attacked the 7th Brigade headquarters in Nitikaikulam. The insurgents, hidden in the tree-line around the base, unleashed machine-gun, RPG and mortar fire, damaging one light helicopter sitting on the base helipad. However, a machine-gun armed Ranjit helicopter soon appeared over the base and strafed the Tigers' firing positions. Neighbouring artillery batteries also opened up, while an Mi-8 arrived soon after and fired volleys of 57mm rockets at them, forcing the militants to withdraw, leaving three of their number behind, as recalled by Wing Commander D.N. Sahae, the Mi-8 pilot:

> We had six–seven helicopters located at Mullaithivu for ongoing operations near Nithikaikulum in which we were providing close air support. … Suddenly a Major came and told me that an attack was on. … He clarified that TAC HQ was under attack by the LTTE … I along with Flying Officer Mukashi rushed to the nearest helicopter (Z 2356) and got airborne. We proceeded at near 'not to be exceeded speed' (VNE) and we were over the target area in less than 10 minutes. Because of high speed there was some additional juddering and vibrations but I ensured that we maintained below VNE. I spotted a Ranjit aircraft flying at about 3,000 feet. I made contact with him and asked him what he was doing up there. He told us about the attack and that he had fired at the suspected militants' location till he had exhausted all the ammunition on board. He thereafter guided us towards the expected location. It was a continuous canopy of tree tops. I carried out a low pass over that position – nothing was visible through the trees and I am sure that the Tigers could not see me either. As I came over the position indicated by the Ranjit, I found that I was being fired at from within the 'canopy' – apparently the Tigers were firing at me from the sound of [the] helicopter as it is doubtful that they could spot me.
>
> I ensured that I was well above the height at which the militants' fire could hit me. This was because I had reserve stocks of 128 live

rockets in my cabin which were meant for any additional task that my detachment required for [the] operation in hand. I knew any hit on one of the rockets or fire in the cabin would result in sympathetic explosion and the helicopter would be blown out of the sky. I could thus not take any chances. Instead of firing my 64 rockets in salvo, I decided to carry out a number of attacks and selected eight rockets to be fired in each attack accordingly. The helicopter was fired at during most of the attacks but I ensured that I was about 50 to 100 feet above the danger height. The firing stopped after I had carried out three or four attacks.[25]

At last, on 25 August, after six days of heavy fighting, the Indian infantrymen invested the major facility defended by the insurgents. The base covered the equivalent of six football fields and included, aside from multiple firing positions and trenches, large numbers of underground barracks and storage areas. At this stage, the bulk of the remaining militants managed to escape in small groups, using the intricate web of hidden paths they had created in the jungle. The battle thus ended on 31 August.

The Mi-25s alone fired around 500 57mm rockets and dropped four 250kg bombs against enemy positions during this operation, while a Chetak engaged enemy snipers in the treetops, firing four AS-11 ATGM – with 'mixed' results. However, these efforts and the continuous supporting fire by Indian artillery batteries did not have a decisive effect on the well-entrenched and well-camouflaged insurgents, whose losses resulted mainly from direct fire-fights with the Indian soldiers. Still, by the time *Checkmate* ended, the LTTE had suffered a series of heavy blows, as the Indians had occupied at least 15 of its bases and seized large stocks of weapons and ammunition, while suffering relatively light casualties. It soon turned out that the operation had met its main goal as the Tigers failed to disrupt the elections in the Vanni region.[26]

Operation Clean Up

In the Amparai, Batticaloa and Trincomalee districts, 36th Infantry Division was operating in a complex environment, largely because of the presence of Tamil, Muslim and Sinhalese communities, but also because the LTTE was very much present, operating from small camps in jungle areas. To further blur matters, SLA units also covered a number of zones. From early February 1988, new areas were transferred under SLA responsibility. Aside from their hit-and-run attacks against Indian troops, the Tigers also routinely targeted Sinhalese villages, thus generating extensive political pressure from Colombo enticing the IPKF to do more to protect Sinhalese civilians – or let Sri Lankan security forces do it in their stead.

LTTE activities remained low-scale in the Trincomalee district, but the Indians continued to launch frequent cordon and search operations to keep the pressure on, usually with limited results, mainly because of lack of coordination with Sri Lankan security forces. In June 1988, the SLA and the LTTE's Trincomalee leadership entered into a secret agreement: the Tigers were to cease altogether their attacks against Sinhalese settlements, while in return the SLA not only allowed the Tigers to operate from areas under its control to harass Indian troops, but supplied them with small amounts of weapons and ammunitions too.[27]

The first large-scale 36th Infantry Division operation came on 5 November 1987, when around 2,000 troops thoroughly searched several sectors identified as LTTE hotbeds, capturing around 150 suspected militants. On 12 February, the IPKF launched Operation *Clean Up* in the Trincomalee and Batticaloa districts. Supervised by 36th Infantry Division HQ, the massive cordon and search operation mobilised as many as 20,000 troops, supported by around 10 Mi-8 and Mi-25 helicopters. The offensive proved particularly effective in Batticaloa district and city: 15 LTTE militants were killed during the operation's first day, while by 15 February, at least two important cadres had been captured. Still, the Indians met with the usual difficulties

Although determined to resist the IPKF, and proudly showing themselves at every opportunity, by February – April 1988 the LTTE insurgents were generally withdrawing and losing control over large swathes of northern Sri Lanka. These three militants wear the usual attire for the Tigers: civilian clothes consisting of shirts and dark jeans. All were armed with AKM assault rifles. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

when attempting to tackle the LTTE jungle bases; the insurgents usually forewarned of enemy advances and simply melting away well before their arrival.

While the LTTE strength in these three districts had been diminished because large numbers of militants had been sent north to take part in the battle of Jaffna, the remaining combatants were virtually running rings around the Indian forces. Even in Batticaloa city, insurgents often opened harassment fire against IPKF posts during the night, triggering much more intensive – and useless – counter-fire.[28]

57th Mountain Division in Charge

On 22 February 1988, the first elements of the 57th Mountain Division began to land in Batticaloa, before taking over the Amparai and Batticaloa districts from the 36th Infantry Division, which in turn concentrated in the Trincomalee district. The 57th Mountain Division had been engaged in counter-insurgency operations in eastern India for several years, while its CO, Major General T.P. Singh, was determined to put this experience to good use in its new area of responsibility:

> Our strategy is to continuously occupy the LTTE bases and hide-outs, to keep them in a state of continuous disruption and disorganisation. If this pressure is eased and they are allowed to rest, they will plot against the army and then I can't rest.[29]

To make things worse for the LTTE, the IPKF held a crucial advantage in both the Batticaloa and Amparai districts. These were the traditional powerbases of the EPRLF – another militant Tamil group that had been ruthlessly attacked by the LTTE two years before, and was thus willing to help the Indians tackle the Tigers as much as they could. The EPRLF not only provided the IPKF with intelligence, but also well-trained and experienced fighters. These had an intimate knowledge of the local terrain, and were thus used as guides or scouts by Indian units.

Almost immediately after the arrival of his division, Major General Singh unleashed Operation *People Chase*, whereby every single building in the city of Batticaloa was searched until 28 February, with the area virtually cleared of any LTTE presence. The Indians then opted to take on the seven known camps held by the LTTE in the area, beginning with the infamous Beirut Base, targeted by Operation *Blooming Tulip* from 21–31 March 1988. During *Blooming Tulip*, after a series of air strikes carried out by Mi-25s and Mi-8s, troops were air landed around the base before investing it, forcing the Tigers to melt away into the jungle. Contrary to what had been happening in the Vanni, 57th Mountain Division established a small garrison there to prevent the insurgents from reoccupying the place, and continued to apply this tactic systematically thereafter. *Blooming Tulip* was only the first of a series of similar operations, such as *Swordfish*, *Steelgray*, *Lilac*, *Rolling Trumpets*, *Red Rose*, *Sweepstake*, *Kranti* and *Angelfire*, all designed to seize and hold enemy bases.[30]

With time, Indian units gained in flexibility, learning to operate in each other's areas of responsibility without any lengthy coordination process, while increasing small-scale raids and swiftly exploiting local intelligence. On some occasions, small detachments from battalions such as the 25 Rajput even operated in civilian clothes and moved in civilian vehicles to avoid early detection.

Although the Indians failed to kill or capture Karuna Amman (alias Vinayagamoorthy Muralitharan), the ruthless and elusive LTTE military commander for the Batticaloa and Amparai districts, this was not the case with a number of other lower-level cadres who were either killed or captured one after the other. By mid-1988, the IPKF had clearly succeeded in forcing the militants active in the two districts to withdraw into jungle camps, where they were targeted

An LTTE insurgent proudly shows a 'home-made' 120mm mortar bomb. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

by regular heliborne operations, which forced them to move to other areas. Even the dispatch of reinforcements from their Vanni stronghold during subsequent months was not enough to reverse this trend. Thus, while 36th Infantry Division still struggled to control the Trincomalee district, Batticaloa and Amparai was where the IPKF counter-insurgency campaign proved the most successful.[31]

Tigers' Lair

A major paradox of the Indian intervention in Sri Lanka was that while the IPKF was engaged in combat operations with the LTTE, Tamil Nadu continued to be a crucial rear-base for the insurgents. The Tigers' networks there went underground once hostilities started, but continued nonetheless to operate relatively freely because they benefited from the leniency of the local authorities and political parties, which largely looked the other way. Hence, the LTTE not only continued to publish large amounts of propaganda from this Indian state, but also sent its wounded fighters there for medical treatment. The movement also continued to use Tamil Nadu as a communication and logistical hub, whose sheer sophistication was described by Yashwant Deva, the then IPKF Chief Signal Officer:

> Our estimate was that approximately 12 HF communication sets were operational in Tamil Nadu. I am certain that there were communications between the supremo and Tamil Nadu wherever he was located; and with LTTE's London office. The latter was partly on radio and partly on overseas communication system.
>
> I conducted a raid with my party on a hostile communication centre at Mandapam. The raid yielded a cache of communication equipment which included a high-powered communication set functioning between Mandapam and Jaffna Peninsula, a number of radio-controlled improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and other miscellaneous gadgetry for establishing communications as well as disrupting communications. … We located two stations at Kodungaiyur and Kottivakkam from where sets were seized and the information was passed on to the Police. No action was taken by the Police.[32]

The LTTE even ran a network of workshops producing not only uniforms but also grenades, IEDs, weapon parts and other equipment. The Indian authorities eventually reacted and pressured the Tamil Nadu government to act. On 8 August 1988, the state police finally cracked down on the LTTE, investing a dozen safe houses in Madurai and Madras and arresting 142 militants, before releasing them on 9 October. They were flown back to Sri Lanka aboard IAF transport aircraft. Despite other similar half-hearted attempts, the large-scale Tiger operations continued, and by mid-1989 Indian intelligence was aware of the continuing existence of large workshops, including one located in Coimbatore that was producing RPG rounds in their hundreds.[33]

Impossible Blockade

The LTTE continued to rely on small boats to smuggle into Sri Lanka the supplies provided by its clandestine infrastructure in Tamil Nadu, or directly transhipped at sea from the merchantmen of its 'Ghost Fleet' that had begun to operate in 1984.[34] The extent of this traffic was such that during the first four months of 1988, the Tamil Nadu police, the Coastguard, and Customs officers seized 10,776 sticks of gelignite, 21,332 detonators, 700kg of other explosives and significant quantities of ammunition. In March and April alone, the police seized 10 small boats along the Tamil Nadu coast, but failed to disrupt significantly the insurgent smuggling networks in the state.

Nonetheless, the Indians were well aware of how the insurgents kept themselves supplied – if only because they had supported them for years – and both the Indian Navy and Coastguard mobilised important means to block the sea-lanes connecting the militants to the outside world. To do that, the two services deployed on average four warships and eight patrol boats to control the waters surrounding the north-eastern and north-western coasts of Sri Lanka, and further reinforced these in early 1988 by converting 15 trawlers into makeshift patrol craft. The Sri Lanka Navy was also very active, operating five or six patrol boats in the same area.[35]

The blockade included an important air component too. While the Indian Coastguard provided a single Fokker F-27 maritime patrol aircraft (MPA) operating from Madras, the Navy engaged no less than three of its squadrons from early 1988. Indian Navy Air Squadron (INAS) 321 'Angels' deployed a small number of Chetak helicopters

The naval activity of the LTTE reached such proportions that the Indian Navy and Coastguard had to make use of smaller patrol boats and – every single day, again and again – patrol and check every fishing boat they could find off the coast of Sri Lanka. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

in Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Kankesanthurai, while Islanders from the INAS 550 'Flying Fish' were deployed for a while at China Bay AB. However, the INAS 310 'Cobras' Alizé single-engine patrol aircraft proved the deadliest for LTTE maritime traffic, largely because of their 68mm rocket pods. Operating from their main base in Madurai, the Alizé launched at least two sorties per day, and sank at least 47 suspected LTTE boats between November 1987 and March 1988. One of the first INAS 310 engagements, on 21 January 1988, was a good illustration of the insurgents suffering losses mostly because of their overconfidence. On this date a single patrolling Alizé spotted a flotilla of six speedboats carrying a dozen passengers each. The aircraft successfully sank one of these while avoiding small-arms fire from the other boats, and, once it had exhausted its rockets, called another Alizé, which sank a second boat whilst the other four made good their escape. Similarly, on 13 February, a Chetak detected a pair of insurgent boats off Mannar island and guided an Alizé toward them, which swiftly destroyed them, before the helicopter machine-gunned the survivors. The insurgents reacted by scaling down their maritime operations for a time before intensifying them again at the end of the year, but with new tactics designed to further complicate their detection. As a result, the number of INAS 310 'kills' decreased dramatically after the first few months of 1988.[36]

The Tigers quickly learned to make the best of the Indian Navy's 'rules of engagement', which authorised attacks against virtually any 'speedboat' sailing more than three miles off the Sri Lankan coast, by using slower fishing vessels – and their losses decreased massively from August 1988. While the Indians had forbidden any fishing at night along the eastern shores of Sri Lanka, it turned out that detecting the LTTE boats among the thousands of genuine fishing boats active between Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka every single day was akin to finding a needle in a haystack. This was made worse by the fact that the Navy was reluctant to acquire in large quantities the small patrol craft that were needed to operate successfully in the numerous shallow waters close to the Sri Lankan coast. The situation was no better on the ground either: raids were conducted on numerous occasions on suspected landing spots but it was impossible for the IPKF to keep a permanent watch on the innumerable sites that the insurgents could use for unloading their shipments. Eventually, by August 1989, the Indian Navy alone had still captured 134 boats used by the insurgents, while the Navy and Coastguard had destroyed 76 boats and captured another 139. In order to achieve this, their ships had sailed a cumulative 13,586 days, including 7,916 days for armed trawlers alone. In the meantime, the aircraft of the two services flew 8,385 flight hours. However, and despite the loss of – according to the Indians – 336 militants at sea, the LTTE retained the ability to import the goods and supplies it needed to continue to operate.[37]

Birth of a Provincial Government

The IPKF's relentless counter-insurgency campaign against the LTTE did provide the intended result, as by the end of 1988, the Tigers were considerably diminished. Meanwhile, Colombo had amended the Constitution, paving the way for the merging of the Northern and Eastern Provinces into the new North-Eastern Province, which became effective on 10 September 1988. Indian diplomats also held extensive talks with the leadership of Tamil political parties and formal militants groups to convince them to take part in elections for the new provincial council, which was in turn to allow for the constitution of a local government. The Indians achieved mixed results, as a number of local politicians proved reluctant to stand as long as fighting between the Indians and Tigers continued. Hence, groups or parties such as EROS, PLOTE, the TULF and part of the TELO refused to enter into the electoral process. On the other hand, both the EPRLF and the ENDLF, widely considered as 'pro-Indian' and fiercely opposed to the LTTE, were willing to take part, as were the Muslim Congress and the UNP – the latter two being mostly active in the Muslim- and Sinhalese-populated areas of the Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Amaparai districts.

Between 15 and 25 September, the Indians made a last-ditch attempt to rally the LTTE by proclaiming a unilateral ceasefire. While the Tigers respected the truce, surrendering their weapons – which was the Indian prerequisite for reintegrating them in the political process – remained an absolute no-go. Once the ceasefire ended, the IPKF reacted by launching an increasing number of heliborne raids, most of the time supported by Mi-25s, to keep the Tigers under pressure, while the insurgents intensified their efforts to re-infiltrate small groups of militants in the Jaffna Peninsula.[38]

Elections finally took place on 19 November 1988 and went undisturbed thanks to a massive IPKF mobilisation, which provided security, but also helped the civilian authorities to manage the whole process, noticeably with Mi-8 helicopters that were heavily used to move the ballot boxes from the polling stations to the processing centres. Both the EPRLF and the ENDLF, which had entered into an alliance, emerged as the victors, gaining 59 out of 71 Provincial Council seats. The Indians claimed a huge success, not only because 399,056 out of the 534,306 registered voters cast their vote, but because the Commonwealth observers that monitored the elections testified that they had been conducted fairly. However, the refusal of several groups to take part undermined the legitimacy of the whole exercise. Indeed, in virtually all the northern districts of the province, Jaffna included, the EPRLF-ENDLF candidates were elected unopposed, while participation rates in LTTE strongholds such as Vadamarachchi or Chavakachcheri were extremely low, at 6–8% and 12–15% respectively.[39]

By the end of November 1988, the new EPRF-ENDLF majority provincial government took office under Chief Minister Varadaraja Perumal. Before long it became embroiled in endless bickering with the national government in Colombo, to the point that it had to commandeer Trincomalee Town Hall in order to have a suitable seat, with the town itself becoming the new provincial capital. Despite these difficulties, and limited funds, the new authorities recruited hundreds of unemployed but highly educated locals and began to open or overhaul schools, colleges and medical facilities. These efforts were insufficient to gain popularity among the Tamil populations, as the February 1989 national parliamentary elections demonstrated. This time, the LTTE made known that although it was not taking part in the contest, it was supporting EROS candidates, who gained far more seats than other Tamil political formations in northern Sri Lanka.

Thus politically strengthened, the LTTE took on the North-Eastern Provincial Government, ordering on 26 March 1989 that public servants should stop work altogether, except for those working in departments crucial for the population's well-being, such as health, electricity, transport or telecommunication, who were allowed to work three days per week.[40]

CHAPTER 5

THE ASSAULT ON MALE

The territory of the Republic of Maldives covers 107,484km^2. The 298km^2 of land is divided between 1,200 islands spread over 27 atolls. Most of these islands are tiny, with an average of 1–2km^2, and none of them is more than 8km long. The presence of shipping lanes that have passed nearby for centuries gives the Maldives its strategic importance. The country's population reached 157,000 in 1983. It was spread over 202 islands, and only 19 of them had more than 1,000 inhabitants. About one-fifth of the total population was concentrated in Male, the capital.

The local population converted to Islam in the 12th Century. Despite several incursions by Western powers – beginning with the Portuguese – the Maldives remained an independent sultanate until 1887, when it became a British protectorate. The local sultan remained free to manage his internal affairs at his own discretion. The Sultanate regained its independence in 1965. Three years later, the country became a republic following a popular referendum that resulted in the accession to power of Ibrahim Nasir, who became President. Under the local constitutional system, the president was elected directly by the *Majlis*, a unicameral parliament of 48 members, eight of whom were appointed by the president, while there were no political parties in the republic and all the other candidates for the *Majlis* ran as individuals.

On 11 November 1978, Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, a former diplomat, became president and Ibrahim Nasir left the country. Nasir was later charged with corruption and of having plotted a return to power on two occasions, in 1980 and 1983. Gayoom also had other opponents, including Abdullah Luthufi, a former foreign minister-turned-businessman. Luthufi was active in Sri Lanka, and in the mid-1980s became acquainted with the PLOTE leadership.[1]

Uma Maheshwaran, the leader of PLOTE, and Luthufi concluded that they had much to gain by cooperating with each other. The PLOTE could provide the fighters needed to stage a coup against Gayoom's government, while Luthufi agreed that once Nasir was back in power, the Sri Lankan Tamil movement would be provided with an uninhabited island to use at its own discretion, notably to tranship supplies and weapons. This could be a game-changer for the PLOTE, which was at the time marginalised both politically – mainly because of its leader's authoritarian behaviour and its notoriously execrable relations with the various Indian authorities – and militarily, since it had been defeated by the LTTE in 1986.[2]

Despite not bothering to inform the politburo and the Central Committee of his decision, Maheshwaran instructed 80 fighters – led by two battle-hardened commanders known under the aliases of Vasanthi and Farook – to support the coup. Such a tiny force was deemed sufficient as the Maldivian National Security Service (NSS) – which protected the country against both external and internal threats – had only 700 poorly equipped men, including two small aircraft and a few patrol boats. The whole venture was thoroughly prepared and militants infiltrated Male months in advance to gather intelligence. In the meantime, other militants located in France attempted to buy a ship that could be used to carry the 80-strong attack team to Male. The project went awry as the French authorities seized the boat because

INS *Godavari* (F20) was the first in a class of three major indigenous warships constructed in India. It comprised a unique combination of a hull based on British designs and outfitted with European-made sensors and communication systems, with Soviet weapons and the capability to carry two big Sea King helicopters. (Indian Navy Photo)

the militants failed to pay for the shipping insurance.

Hence, the PLOTE activists had to resort to the capture of two trawlers off Kalpitiya harbour in Sri Lanka, before heading to the Maldives with about 40 activists aboard each boat. The first group was led by Vasanthi and was to take over the only military base in Male. It included a team, led by Babu, whose mission was to seize the island's radio station and telephone exchange. The second group, commanded by Farook, was to take over the Presidency and the Ministry of Defence. PLOTE activists were to be reinforced as soon as they arrived by Mauritians loyal to Luthufi. The two trawlers began their journey on 30 October 1988, but were delayed by poor weather and only reached the Maldives early in the morning of 3 November.

Once it landed on Male, Vasanthi's detachment accumulated setbacks. The group's only radio was lost during docking, making communication with the second detachment impossible. The militants then encountered police officers as they advanced towards the NSS base, prompting an exchange of fire that alerted the camp. When they arrived in front of the base, the militants were greeted by the garrison's fire, which killed Vasanthi and forced the other militants to limit themselves to besieging the base instead of investing it. The group led by Babu also quickly got into trouble. While he managed without difficulty to reach the front of the building housing the radio and telephone exchange, he was unable to enter it because he did not have explosive charges powerful enough to force the steel gates, and this failure proved fatal for the whole operation.

President Gayoom's bodyguards, hearing the fire-fights at the NSS garrison, immediately evacuated the president to a private house before the Farook-led group reached the presidential residence. The militants embarked on a desperate search for their target, but in vain. At 7:00 A.M., taking advantage of the fact that communications between the island and the rest of the world remained open, the president launched appeals for help to all friendly powers likely to help him, namely the USA, Great Britain, Malaysia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and India.

Rushed Planning

While London, Islamabad and Kuala Lumpur lacked the means or the will to intervene swiftly, Washington had significant forces available on short notice in Diego Garcia, and this in turn could only place the Indian government under tremendous pressure.

Indeed, the arrival in New Delhi – at around 6:00 A.M. as New Delhi was an hour behind the Maldives – of the Maldivian president's request stirred up the proverbial 'hornet's nest': a crisis meeting involving the most important figures in the government and armed forces, including Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, took place the same morning. During the meeting, the decision was taken not only to reject a Sri Lankan proposal to transport SLA troops using IAF transport aircraft, but also to pre-empt any other third-party intervention by launching an Indian military operation – immediately. The Indian decision-makers entrusted the mission to the Agra-based 50th Parachute Brigade, as only an airborne operation could be initiated swiftly enough.

This decision put Brigadier Farooq Bulsara, the Brigade CO, in a difficult situation: none of his three battalions was available at full strength. One company of 3 Para was in Lucknow for security duties, as were two companies of 6 Para that were protecting the Agra Arsenal, while the entire 7 Para was engaged in field manoeuvres. Although the two companies of 6 Para were immediately recalled – to the dismay of the arsenal personnel since no takeover was organised – it was decided that the first wave of the operation would consist of two reinforced companies, one from 3 Para and the other from 6 Para, a total of 400 men. These elements were to be followed by the bulk of 6 Para and then the whole brigade. In the meantime, the IAF prepared four Il-76s and 16 An-32s for a take-off planned at 9:45 A.M. Finally, Mi-8 helicopters, old Canberra bombers and Mirage 2000H interceptors were forward deployed to Trivandrum, and prepared to fly combat sorties over the Maldives.[3]

The navy was mobilised too. That day, both the cadet training ship INS *Tir* and the frigate INS *Godavari* were rerouted toward the Maldives. The INS *Betwa*, an old Type 41 frigate converted into a training ship, also raised anchor from Cochin and sailed toward the archipelago. Furthermore, the destroyers INS *Rajput* and INS *Ranjit*, the frigates INS *Gomati*, INS *Trishul* and INS *Nilgiri*, the amphibious ships INS *Kumbhir* and INS *Cheetah*, as well as the tanker INS *Deepak*, were ordered to prepare to sail out of their harbours on short notice, while by 2:15 P.M., the first patrol aircraft overflew the Maldives.[4]

The planning of the operation was sketchy at best. The officers in charge could only rely on tourist maps and photo albums to draw their plans. Moreover, the information available on the enemy was extremely inaccurate, with estimates of its strength ranging from 150–

The little-known INS *Tir* (A86) was a cadet training ship commissioned into the Indian Navy in 1986. (Indian Navy Photo)

1,000 men. To make matters worse, there was still uncertainty about the international airport serving Male. While it was known to be in government hands, there was no guarantee that the insurgents would not manage to take control of it by the time the first Indian aircraft arrived. The latter perspective was daunting, as the only way to seize the IAP would have been to drop paratroopers, and such a jump had every chance of turning into a disaster. Indeed, Hulule Island, where the IAP was sited, was so small that it was practically inevitable that a large number of paratroopers would land in the sea and drown, instead of on the island, especially as the average wind speed there was 20 km/h. The survival rate in such a drop on Hulule was estimated at 70%. Because of the lack of alternatives, the Indians decided to take the risk if needed. With the airport secured, the paratroopers were to seize local boats – known as dhonis – before crossing the 15km separating the islands of Hulule and Male.

Operation *Cactus*

The operation, named *Cactus*, began on 3 November shortly before 5:00 A.M. when the first wave of paratroopers took off from Agra airport aboard *Friendly One* and *Friendly Two* – the call signs of the two Il-76s of No. 44 Squadron in charge of transporting the two reinforced companies to Hulule. The flight went smoothly, and shortly before their arrival, the radio operator of the leading Il-76 received a NSS transmission confirming that they were still holding the airport, to the great relief of Brigadier Bulsura, who was finally able to rule out the suicidal paratrooper jump. During the aircraft's final approach, the runway lights went on for 10 seconds before turning off, which was the code agreed with the NSS. The pair of Ilyushins landed a few minutes before 10:00 P.M., after a flight of 4 hours and 44 minutes. The paratroopers rushed to secure the terminal, and then the whole island, without encountering any serious opposition. The only incident was an exchange of small-arms fire with a few PLOTE activists who tried to land on Hulule at the same time.

The paratroopers swiftly seized several dhonis moored along the island jetties and immediately launched their attack against Male. It was necessary to act quickly because the president's pleas for help were becoming more pressing as the Tamil militants were searching the area where he was hiding. Two detachments thus embarked on the boats and headed for the capital. A company of 6 Para soon established a beachhead southeast of Male, while a platoon embarked on two dhonis created a diversion by sailing towards the main pier of the island. Pretending to land there, they exchanged heavy fire with members of the PLOTE guarding the pier. Meanwhile, the 6 Para company landed unopposed and sent a party that infiltrated the city and reached the president's safe house at 2:10 A.M. on 4 November. The paratroopers then exfiltrated the president, despite the initial reluctance of his bodyguards.

By dawn, IAF An-12s, An-32s and Il-76s had transported the rest of 3 and 6 Para as well as the Brigade Headquarters to Hulule. By mid-morning, a pair of Mi-8s also arrived from Trivandrum and began to carry troops from Hulele to Male. In total, the IAF transport fleet managed to fly 1,650 troops, 16 vehicles and 17 recoilless guns, mortars and mountain guns, as well 8.4 tons of ammunition, to Hulule in a matter of hours.[5] These troops secured the capital without difficulty and captured about 30 Tamil militants and local activists, while Mirage 2000s overflew the city in a show of force. A section of paratroopers patrolling the waters surrounding the island aboard a boat also captured four activists who were trying to escape after a brief exchange of fire.

The Hunt for the MV *Progress Light*

When the Indians landed in Hulule, the bulk of the PLOTE militants, as well as Abdullah Luthufi, concluded that their operation had failed and decided to flee. The more or less 60-strong group seized a merchant ship anchored in the port of Male, the MV *Progress Light*, pressed its crew and captured other hostages – including a Maldivian minister and his Swiss mother-in-law – before fleeing. The MV *Progress Light* lifted anchor on 4 November at 00:10 A.M. before passing near Hulule and entering the open sea. Indian soldiers stationed on Hulule spotted the ship and fired several Karl Gustav rounds at it, but this failed to prevent the merchantman's escape.

After several hours, Indian Navy maritime patrol aircraft were sent to track the ship. At 09:25 A.M., an Il-38 spotted the MV *Progress Light* about 40 miles from Male. It headed north after seeing the four-engine Indian aircraft, hoping to reach the Sri Lankan coast and escape its pursuers. The Il-38s and Tu-142Ms of INAS 312 'Albatross' (also known as 'The Mighty Props') and 315 'The Winged Stallions' constantly monitored the merchantman. The frigate INS *Godavari*, which had just returned from a visit to Australia and New Zealand, and the training frigate INS *Betwa* were ordered to go after the *Progress Light*. INS *Betwa* first intercepted it at 02:45 A.M. on 5 November, followed by INS *Godavari* later that morning.

Godavari (skipper Captain S.V. Gopalachari) established radio contact with the fleeing ship, but the militants ordered the Indians to stay six miles away otherwise hostages would be executed. Although they suspected that the PLOTE militants were merely playing for time until they were close enough to the Sri Lankan coast to escape in speedboats, the Indians complied with this ultimatum and simply followed the cargo ship from a safe distance for several hours. Meanwhile, Uma Maheswaran, the PLOTE leader, contacted the Indian authorities and requested them to let the ship dock in a Tamil Nadu harbour, where his fighters would surrender. However, he then changed his mind and informed the Indians that the *Progress Light* would sail toward Sri Lanka, and requested them to pressure Colombo into granting an amnesty to his men. This proved unacceptable for President Jayewardene; the ship would not be allowed to dock in a Sri Lankan harbour.[6] Events accelerated when Indian intelligence reported the departure of Sri Lanka Navy vessels from Colombo harbour with orders to sink the *Progress Light* if it came within 100 miles of the Sri Lankan coast.

Accordingly, the INS *Godavari* was ordered to stop the cargo ship and, around midnight, closed on *Progress Light*. The insurgents carried out their threat and took two of their hostages to the bridge before executing them, tying their bodies to lifebuoys and throwing them into the sea. The Indian crew's reaction was swift, one of the frigate's 30mm AK-230 anti-aircraft batteries opening fire, hitting the ship's charging mast and dropping the speedboat supported by it into the sea – and with it, the last hope of the activists to escape. The two Indian ships continued to fire, deliberately surrounding the *Progress Light* with geysers. The frigate's Sea King helicopter joined the show of force and dropped depth charges near the merchant ship, whose detonations shook it along the whole length of its hull, while the INAS 310 aircraft made low-flying passes, increasing the pressure on the insurgents, as recalled by *Godavari*'s skipper:

> Soon after midnight on 5-6 November, *Progress Light* was given the choice of returning to Male or heading for an Indian port – she refused. A firm warning was issued. This evoked no response. A warning shot was fired across the bows. It failed to persuade the hijackers. Close range gunfire was aimed at the forward goal post mast. It dislodged the swinging derrick which (fortuitously) fell on

INS *Betwa* was a British-built, Leopard-class frigate – the first of which, HMS *Jaguar* (F37), is shown here. (Royal Navy Photo)

top of their fast speed escape craft.

After dawn on the 6th, pressure was increased. *Godavari*'s Sea King dropped two depth charges ahead of the bows. *Progress Light* continued on her course. Close range gunfire was aimed at the aft mast and funnel. At 0825, a frantic report from the Master of the *Progress Light* indicated that the rebels had surrendered. The ship however continued to move ahead. *Betwa* opened fire – one of her shells hit *Progress Light* amidships and she stopped.[7]

Aside from the *Betwa*'s direct hit and *Godavari*'s AK-230 fire, the Indians did not directly target the cargo ship, but nonetheless the shower of shell fragments killed four other hostages and panicked the PLOTE militants. Three of them jumped overboard before Luthufi and his men finally surrendered at 08:54 A.M. on 6 November. The Indians ordered them to gather away from the surviving hostages, then their commandos boarded the ship. The militants, crew and hostages were transhipped aboard the Indian Navy ships, and eight injured hostages were flown to Trivandrum to receive medical attention.

The Indian sailors were unable to control both the flooding and the fire that had erupted aboard MV *Progress Light*, which capsized at dawn the following day, 56 miles from Colombo.[8]

India Rising

The bulk of 50th Parachute Brigade was withdrawn by 16 November, only a limited Indian contingent of 300 men remaining in the Maldives for a further year. Operation *Cactus* had been a tremendous success. Despite the immense risks taken on the eve of the operation, only a single serviceman was wounded during the retaking of Male. Most importantly, New Delhi successfully pre-empted any other power's intervention within what it considered its own backyard. That said, Operation *Cactus* was a 'close call' indeed, as at 8:00 A.M. on 5 November, the Indians had been contacted by a task force of the US Navy – including at least one helicopter landing ship, three escorts, and a British destroyer – announcing its arrival in the vicinity of Male within four hours. For the PLOTE leader, the failed Maldivian coup proved the last nail in the coffin: Uma Maheswaran was assassinated in Colombo on 16 July 1989 by hitmen from an unknown group.[9]

CHAPTER 6:
OUTMANOEUVRING THE IPKF

Once the Provincial Council elections were successfully concluded, the IPKF units resumed their operations against LTTE sanctuaries, especially so in the Vanni. The 4th Infantry Division initiated a new offensive in the Nettikaikulam area, which had been reoccupied by insurgents once Operation *Checkmate II* ended, and the latter was followed by Operation *Baaz*, also in the Mullaitivu district, during the first half of March 1989. During *Baaz*, almost 5,000 troops converged against a string of LTTE camps established near the Nayaru lagoon. Two Gorkha companies that acted as a vanguard found themselves engaged in a vicious and protracted fire-fight – to the point that, having exhausted their ammunition supply, some Gorkhas had to resort to their kukris. *Baaz* had the usual outcome: the insurgents evacuated their camps and dispersed into the jungle, although after losing around 50 fighters killed in combat according to the Indians, who suffered 15 killed in this operation. As always, helicopters proved instrumental, with six Mi-8s from No. 109 HU flying 209 sorties between 5 and 9 March, while Mi-25s from No. 125 HU also flew several air strikes.[1]

This was followed in quick succession by Operations *Samsher* and *Campus*, in late March, which targeted other areas of the Mullaitivu district and consisted mainly of heliborne operations supported by Mi-25 strikes. Furthermore, two infantry battalions and 5 Para Battalion launched another series of air assaults in the Vavunikulam area of the Kilinochchi district between 21 and 24 April, keeping pressure on the LTTE jungle camps.[2]

Despite their limitations, these operations gradually wore down

A group of Indian Army officers following their troops once the landing zone was secured during one of their heliborne operations in March and April 1989. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

the LTTE. By May, the IPKF was monitoring clear signs of enemy exhaustion. While the Tigers continued to be as disciplined as ever, a number of their low-level leaders and numerous fighters were less experienced than before. The numbers of militant bodies left behind after engagements increased, while the guerrillas increasingly opened fire from safer distances, as much as 400 metres, instead of launching the deadly close-range attacks that used to be their trademark. As a number of Indian troops had equally grown wary, several engagements now comprised long-distance exchanges of rifle fire followed by mutual disengagement. As a whole, it was increasingly looking like the IPKF strategy of attrition against the insurgents until they had to negotiate and accept the July 1987 accord was succeeding.[3]

Change of Paradigm

In the end, it was Ranasinghe Premadasa's takeover as the new president of Sri Lanka in January 1989 that ruined the entire Indian strategy. Premadasa not only fiercely opposed the accord imposed by New Delhi, but also had an almost life-or-death interest in undermining the JVP's main political advantage through – as already explained – forcing the Indians into withdrawing the IPKF as soon as possible.

On 12 April 1989, the new administration announced a unilateral ceasefire, inviting both the JVP and LTTE to begin peace talks. While the JVP refused, the hard-pressed LTTE leadership scented a golden opportunity and almost immediately agreed to negotiate with Colombo. The crucial difference was that Colombo, contrary to New Delhi, did not ask the LTTE to give up its weapons as a prerequisite for entering into a peace process. In essence, and in a single stroke, the insurgents gained desperately needed political manoeuvring space, virtually offered on a platter.

Parleys went extremely fast. Following a phone call between Anton Balashingham, the LTTE chief negotiator, then based in London, and Premadasa on 12 April, the former arrived in Colombo with his wife, Adele, and met with the Sri Lankan president on 27 April. A few days later, on 4 May, two SLAF Bell helicopters picked up another LTTE negotiation team in Nederkerni, in the vicinity of base Alpha Four. Aside from negotiators such as Yogaratnam Yogi, the team also included a communication specialist and several bodyguards. The LTTE delegation was lodged in the Colombo Hilton Hotel, and ironically the police Special Task Force – the same unit that had mercilessly tracked down its militants in Batticaloa and Amparai districts during previous years – ensured its protection.

On 29 May, the government agreed to secretly free a dozen LTTE cadres kept in custody, while on 28 June, the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government announced a cessation of hostilities. Premedasa went

The arrival of the LTTE delegation in Colombo on 4 May 1989. (Rohan Gunaratna Collection)

President Premadasa (left) meeting LTTE representative Mahatthaya. (Rohan Gunaratna Collection)

public on 1 June, announcing that the IPKF presence was no longer necessary and requesting that New Delhi withdraw its forces by the end of July, explaining in a letter addressed to Rajiv Gandhi the following day: "The complete withdrawal of the IPKF, will, hopefully, contribute to stabilizing the situation in Sri Lanka, where the presence of the IPKF has become a deeply divisive and resentful issue."[4]

Storm over the Vanni

New Delhi's initial reaction was an outright refusal to withdraw the IPKF, as long as the accord dispositions were not implemented. Instead, the IPKF launched a massive new offensive, Operation *Toofan* (Storm), from mid-June to mid-July 1989 in a desperate bid to force the LTTE to surrender its weapons. The 4th Infantry Division's units – with 41st Infantry Brigade in Vavuniya, 167th Mountain Brigade in Mannar and 7th Infantry Brigade in Mullaitivu – supported by 93rd Field Artillery Regiment and 65th Armoured Regiment detachments and several Para Commando battalions, swept through the jungle areas which harboured the main insurgent camps all over the Vanni. While the Indians claimed to have killed 108 militants, seized numerous camps and captured large stocks of supplies this last-ditch offensive ultimately failed to force the LTTE leadership to rally to the accord.[5]

The Tigers had not lost their claws however, launching several hit-and-run attacks, and this eventually became an outright political defeat for the Indians in the Jaffna Peninsula. It turned out that discipline in several Indian units – especially those garrisoned in areas where the local population was notoriously supportive of the LTTE – had grown lax. When on 26 July, a few militants launched an attack against an IPKF camp, the Indians soldiers retaliated against local civilians, killing 15 and wounding another 11. Then, on 30 July, the LTTE launched a particularly large assault against a post held by a detachment of the 2 Madras in Adampur, only to be repulsed with heavy losses due to artillery and Ranjit helicopters strikes.

However, disaster struck the IPKF on 2 August. That day, the militants launched a spectacular operation against another Indian position in the Valvettithurai area in the Jaffna Peninsula, killing one officer and six soldiers. The garrison went on the rampage as a result, burned 123 houses and 44 shops near their base, executed 52 civilians and injured another 20. The incident was widely publicised and became known as the 'Indian Mai Lai' after the infamous incident during which a troop of US Army soldiers committed a similar atrocity in Vietnam, and deeply undermined the Indian political stance.[6]

Lethal Confidence Building

Meanwhile, the LTTE had been hard-pressed by the Indian onslaught in the Vanni and was in urgent need of weapons and ammunition. Anton Balasingham, the movement's chief negotiator, requested the Sri Lankan government to provide the insurgents with shipments of arms and ammunition.[7] The Sri Lankan President approved such deliveries and the LTTE leadership drafted a wish list of the weapons it needed the most. The first shipment followed within a week, with the following rationale, according to the then Foreign Minister, Abdul Cader Shahul Hameed: "By providing arms and ammunition to the LTTE, we made them feel that we had taken them in our confidence."[8]

Among the first weapon shipments were 400 brand-new Chinese Type 81 assault rifles initially ordered by the SLAF, while around 2,000 Type 56 assault rifles and 200,000 rounds were delivered from the SLA's own arsenals, as well as hand grenades in their thousands. This was not all, as the government also provided the insurgents with at least 20 vehicles, tons of cement and 20 million LKR (Sri Lankan Rupees) in cash. Furthermore, the LTTE was allowed to use the country's facilities for shipping its own weapons and supplies, making the Indian blockade completely irrelevant. This support became an open secret, and a number of Sri Lankan security personnel were incensed by this sudden policy change – as were many LTTE militants.

To these hardliners, Velupillai Prabhakaran explained that Colombo remained the LTTE's main adversary in the long run, and that the newly made alliance was temporary in nature. This was to be compared with the Chinese Communist Party alliance with the Chinese Nationalists once the Japanese had invaded, which lasted only until the common foreign enemy had left the country.

It is hardly surprising that the LTTE used its delegation in Colombo, and thus its militants' ability to move unimpeded, to build a large and well-organised network of clandestine cells in the capital among the large Tamil communities, under the aegis of Pottu Amman, the movement's intelligence leader. In this fashion, the LTTE built itself a crucial asset which was to have far-reaching consequences during the next decade.[9]

Tense Negotiations

As the Indians refused any IPKF withdrawal short of a full implementation of the accord, several tense exchanges followed between Colombo and New Delhi. This went so far that Ranasinghe Premedasa even threatened to order the Sri Lankan Armed Forces to move against Indian troops. The Indians planned a two-phased offensive on their own, named *Mahaan Kartavya* (Supreme Duty), with the first phase including the capture of Anuradhapura. Some outright shows of force also took place: a full tank regiment – supported by Mi-25s for good measure – was paraded in front of a delegation of high-ranking SLA officers, while two pairs of IAF Mirage 2000s and Jaguars made low-altitude flying passes over virtually all of the Sri Lankan

A Sea King Mk 42/42B helicopter of the INAS 330 'Harpoons' or INAS 336 'Flaming Arrows' above the deck of INS *Vikrant*. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

garrisons located in the North-Eastern Province.

As in July 1987, the Indians took steps in order to evacuate their diplomats from Colombo if needed. The aircraft carrier INS *Viraat* (under Captain Madhvendra Singh) left Bombay and moved to Cochin, where it arrived on 21 July, before cruising off the Sri Lankan coast. Together with INS *Shakti* and INS *Taragari*, the carrier formed Task Group 52.2, under Rear Admiral Inder Bedi. The *Viraat* carried not only an air group including four Sea Harrier fighters (INAS 300), five Sea Kings (INAS 330 & INAS 336) and four Chetak helicopters (INAS 321 & INAS 561), but also the 7 Garhwal Rifles and an IMSF platoon. However, by 12 August, tensions had lowered and the carrier was ordered to disembark its aircraft. However, while clearly neither the SLA nor the LTTE could even hope to expel the IPKF by force, it soon turned out that Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was in an unsustainable political position. Seeing two former belligerents allying together to request a peacekeeping force to leave was already a difficult proposition, but the Sri Lankan venture was increasingly unpopular in India too. To make matters worse, the Gandhi administration was embroiled in the infamous Bofors scandal, linked to bribes paid by the Swedish manufacturer to high-ranking Indian officials during the acquisition process of FH-77 155mm guns.

A formation of Sea Harrier FRS.Mk 51s of the INAS 300 'White Tigers' shortly after their arrival in India in the early 1980s. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

A Sea Harrier FRS.Mk 51 of INAS 300 landing on the deck of INS *Vikrant*. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

The Indian Congress Party lost the November 1989 elections to the opposition, with Vishwanath Pratap Singh – a fierce critic of the IPKF presence in Sri Lanka – becoming prime minister in early December. By then, Rajiv Gandhi had been forced to give in over the IPKF. On 28 July, New Delhi had accepted the principle of a withdrawal, whose modalities were defined in an agreement reached on 19 September 1989,[10] while the following day, the IPKF entered into a cease-fire with the LTTE. While authorised to reply in kind if attacked, the IPKF was forbidden to take any offensive action.[11]

IPKF Withdrawal

Once the withdrawal was announced on 18 September 1989 and despite an official deadline for the year's end, the IPKF planned for a methodical departure.[12] The troops in the Amparai and Batticaloa districts were to be withdrawn by 30 November, followed by those in Mannar and Mullaitivu, as well as Killinochchi and Vavuniya by 31 December 1989 and 31 January 1990 respectively. All these forces were to converge toward the harbours of Kankesanthurai and Trincomalee, where they would embark for their return trip to India. Both ports were in turn to be vacated by 31 March. Great care was taken to minimise the troops' exposure – even if no serious breaches of the ceasefire were reported. Ranjit, Mi-25 and Mi-8 helicopters escorted most of the road convoys carrying the departing units. During March 1990, the IAF kept ready several No. 7 Squadron Mirage 2000s in Trivandrum and No. 5 Squadron Jaguars in Bangalore to launch airstrikes on short notice if needed.

The withdrawal itself went roughly according to plan. By 22 December 1989, Indian troops had left Vavuniya, while Jaffna town was evacuated by 3 February 1990. On 24 March 1990, the last Indian troops – one squadron of the 65th Armoured Regiment and elements of the 10th Para Commando – boarded the INS *Magar* and MV *Akbar* in Trincomalee, thus ending the IPKF presence in Sri Lanka.[13]

Stillborn Army

Almost from the outset, the IPKF had supported the creation of a new, locally recruited police and law enforcement force, but Colombo gave its approval to do so only in October 1988. This body, named the Citizen Volunteer Force (CVF), came into being in December 1988. Although central government did deliver 1,500 Type 84S rifles to equip the new organisation, it remained nonetheless reluctant to support it, noticeably by delaying the payment of its personnel. The

The first Indian troops –from one of the Sikh regiments – departing Sri Lanka. (Adrien Fontanellaz Collection)

Gorkha troops on one of the ships taking them home in late 1989. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Pilots, navigators and flight technicians of No. 109 Helicopter Unit, IAF, before their departure. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

IPKF thus became heavily involved in both training and equipping the CVF. A major problem was recruitment, as very few qualified people volunteered, as recalled by S.C. Sardesphande, CO of the 54th Indian Division:

> Yet, the material that came to us and went through the training schedule was unsatisfactory. It consisted mostly of under-educated riff-raff, ill disciplined, unmotivated, physically weak and often with criminal inclinations. The CVF was disappointing in both quality and quantity.[14]

The CVF was widely perceived as a partisan organisation serving the political parties that had won the provincial elections. To make matters worse, it also became renowned for its corruption and its exactions against the public. While a force as large as 7,000 had been envisioned, a mere 2,000 volunteers had been trained by mid-1989. Furthermore, the CVF presence in the northern part of the province was limited to specific areas in the Jaffna Peninsula and the Killinochchi disrict.[15]

Once President Premedasa went public on 1 June 1989 to require an IPKF withdrawal at the earliest possible opportunity, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi also reacted by giving the green light to RAW in order to raise, train and equip an entirely new Sri Lankan Tamil armed force. First known as the Additional Citizen Volunteer Force, and then the Tamil National Army (TNA), this force was to provide the North-Eastern Province government with an armed branch that could act as a counterweight to the LTTE once the IPKF had left. While a number of early TNA personnel were battle-hardened militants from organisations such as the EPRLF or PLOTE, the pool of existing experienced fighters was insufficient to meet the ambitious build-up planned by RAW and the NEPG, which envisioned a force of as many as 30,000 fighters. The Indians soon began to deliver thousands of small arms – including Yugoslav M70 assault rifles – as well as infantry support weapons such as light mortars and RPG launchers, while the Indian Army Training Corps dispatched instructors to Sri Lanka to train new fighters in an array of dedicated camps. Hundreds of TNA recruits were also sent to India to receive specialised or advanced training.

The NEPG acknowledged the existence on the new force on 4 October 1989, but by then, several major flaws had compromised the whole TNA build-up. The worst was that to reach its overambitious recruitment targets, the TNA relied on forced recruitment – groups of young men were literally kidnapped in front of their schools, in markets or at checkpoints before being taken to training camps. Unsurprisingly, desertion became endemic, especially as the salaries were low, averaging between 500 and 1,000 LKR. TNA officers reacted by shaving the head and eyebrows of new recruits in order to identify deserters. Thousands of youngsters fled the province to Southern and Central Sri Lanka, while others joined the LTTE. Furthermore, the TNA was not much of a unified body, but a conglomerate

The crew of a Mi-25 from No. 125 Helicopter Unit, IAF, with their mount – which is clearly showing traces of heavy use. (Albert Grandolini Collection)

Deployed on board the aircraft carrier INS *Viraat*, Sea Harriers of INAS 300 were prepared for the provision of top cover for a possible evacuation of Indian diplomatic personnel from Colombo. (Photo by Mike Freer)

of armed wings from different militant groups. While in November 1989 the TNA had an impressive 11 company-sized groups of 105 men active in the Amparai district, under the overall command of Khalid, a former PLOTE commander trained in Lebanon, six of those consisted of EPRLF loyalists, two of TELO militants, another two of ENDLF militants and the last one of PLOTE sympathisers. Such lack of cohesiveness was courting disaster against a movement such as the LTTE.[16]

Tigers' Triumph

The LTTE was hell-bent on asserting its supremacy over the North-Eastern Province – and hence, the other Tamil movements – once the Indians withdrew, and had made this absolutely clear on 13 July 1989. That day, three LTTE hitmen, on the pretext of being negotiators, met with Appapilla Amirthalingam, the leader of the TULF, Vettivelu Yogeswaran, an MP of the same political party, and another TULF cadre in a house in Colombo. The first two were killed by the three hitmen, while the third was grievously injured, before the police officers tasked to protect them intervened and shot the three assassins

Chief Minister Perumal – de-facto president of the provincial government – inspecting CVF troops in early 1989. (Rohan Gunaratna Collection)

A group of TNA soldiers. (Rohan Gunaratna Collection)

dead.[17]

What caused the death of the two Tamil politicians was their support for the continuing presence of the IPKF in Sri Lanka, as later emphasised by Mahattaya, the LTTE second-in-command:

> They were not killed because they held views different from the LTTE but probably because they were acting as agents of India, in short traitors, collaborators. In the battleground, the LTTE kills those who betray the cause.[18]

The Tigers escalated their campaign against the NEPG in September by threatening to kill the civil servants attached to it if they did not resign from their position by 1 October. The EPRLF reacted by executing several suspected LTTE militants. Hence, the eruption of fighting between the TNA and LTTE in the wake of the Indian withdrawal was unavoidable, and began in the Amparai district, vacated by the IPKF on 24 October 1988. On 5 November 1989, LTTE militants simultaneously attacked two TNA camps in the district and overran them without much difficulty, capturing large stocks of weapons and ammunition in the process. The TNA rushed in reinforcements, only for a convoy of four trucks packed with fighters to be ambushed and scattered in a Tiger ambush.

The TNA reaction came on 17 November, and did not target the LTTE, but the Sri Lankan security forces instead, in a desperate bid to escalate the conflict and draw back the IPKF. An estimated 700 fighters assaulted six police stations and killed 44 police officers, but the attackers lost 75 men. Several days of confused fighting followed, including a large-scale attack supported by mortar fire against Kalmunai police station on 19 November. Sri Lankan security forces reacted swiftly, supported by SLAF Bell 212 gunships, and occupied six TNA camps in the Amparai district alone. In just a few days, the LTTE and Sri Lankan security forces asserted their control over the district, in what was virtually an alliance against the TNA.[19]

On 26 November, the LTTE struck in the Jaffna Peninsula and overran a TNA company-sized force garrisoned in the vicinity of Jaffna town. After several hours of combat, the TNA fighters scattered, leaving behind 24 casualties and their stocks of weapons and ammunition. Things were no better in the Batticaloa district, despite the TNA initially having the upper hand – until LTTE reinforcements were flown in by SLAF helicopters. Thus reinforced, the Tigers launched regular attacks against TNA positions, while the locally based Sri Lankan police and army units were instructed by Colombo to not interfere. In the meantime, force-recruited TNA fighters were deserting in droves while the Tigers captured hundreds of others.

The November elections in India proved the last nail on the coffin for both the NEPG and the TNA. Once in power, the new Indian government ceased all support for them, despite desperate pleas by the province's chief minister. Thereafter, the LTTE seized the territories vacated by the IPKF almost unhindered, as both the TNA and CVF melted away. By the end of March 1990, the LTTE emerged victorious from the IPKF episode. It found itself in total control of virtually all the Tamil-populated areas of the North-Eastern Province, as its opponents – including hundreds of former TNA fighters – were ruthlessly purged or went into exile. It was also expanding its military capability fast, recruiting new fighters in their thousands and making good use of the thousands of Indian-delivered weapons captured from the TNA.[20]

POSTSCRIPT
DEATH OF RAJIV GANDHI

The IPKF, once intended as a peacekeeping force, had found itself engaged in vicious urban fighting over several weeks, and thereafter in a protracted counter-insurgency campaign on foreign soil. The force stayed in Sri Lanka for 967 days and suffered heavy casualties, with 1,155 KIA and around 4,500 WIA. These losses were staggering, being slightly higher than those suffered by the Indians during their 1971 conquest of Bangladesh – against a full Pakistani army corps. However, by the end of 1988, and despite their initial lack of preparation, the Indian troops nonetheless played the part they were intended to by grinding down and isolating the LTTE.

Between 10 October 1987 and 12 July 1989, the Tigers reportedly lost 754 KIA against the IPKF – and later confirmed their losses for 1987, 1988 and 1989 as 451, 363 and 372 KIA respectively – so there is no doubt that the movement was considerably enfeebled by early 1989. Ironically, it was indeed forced to negotiate as envisioned by the Indian strategists, but – unforeseen by them – to do so with another party, thus defeating the Indians where it mattered the most: on the political level.[1]

Shadow Warfare

As already mentioned, lack of cooperation between the IPKF and Indian intelligence agencies proved a critical flaw throughout the intervention, but RAW nonetheless did engage in its own spy game against the LTTE. Allegedly, RAW attempted to recruit Kittu, the former LTTE Jaffna commander, while he was staying in Madras, and paid him a monthly stipend to provide information. Furthermore, in 1989, RAW successfully recruited Mahattaya, the LTTE number two, while he was part of the delegation negotiating with President Premedasa's administration. Incredibly, RAW nearly compromised its own asset during a psychological operation intended to destabilise the LTTE in July 1989 by leaking false information to Indian journalists. On 24 July, the newspaper, *The Hindu*, published an article about the death of Velupillai Prabhakaran, allegedly killed in an internal coup among the movement, and the takeover of Mahattaya as new LTTE leader. The only result of such a fabricated story was to raise suspicions among the LTTE leadership.[2]

Ironically, the Indians came very close to killing Prabhakaran, but in a much more straightforward fashion. On several occasions, IPKF artillery rounds and Mi-25-delivered bombs fell just short of bunkers where the insurgent leader was sheltering, as confirmed by him in an interview in the aftermath of the Indian withdrawal: "On several occasions they came within 50 to 100 yards of my headquarters. Sometimes 250-kilogram bombs were dropped and exploded close by. The shock waves from some of the bombs brushed my uniform."[3]

In 1990, the LTTE's own intelligence wing retaliated against India. The movement's leadership had decided to support its own proxy in Tamil Nadu in order to quick-start an outright insurgency if needed. A marginal independent group, the Tamil National Retrieval Troops (TNRT), which included three dozen members at most, sent several militants, including their leader, to Jaffna, where they received training in LTTE camps. The Tigers also provided the TNRT with a few small-calibre weapons and ammunition, as well as funds in the form of gold bars.[4]

The Tigers had progressively fewer qualms about escalating their involvement in India if they felt the need to do so – especially as, with the IPKF withdrawal, their networks in Tamil Nadu could operate virtually at will. The first such instance came when Pottu Amman, the head of the LTTE intelligence wing, was ordered to take on the EPRLF leadership, which had found refuge in Madras after the crumbling of the NEPG and TNA. Although badly defeated, the EPRLF remained a potential rival, especially as Colombo was willing to reopen negotiation channels with it in order to play one Tamil movement against the other. The LTTE, determined that nothing of this kind should happen, first sent an intelligence operative to infiltrate the EPRLF sympathisers' community in Madras, and the spy soon gained access to actionable intelligence. The second step was the infiltration in Tamil Nadu of a dedicated hitman squad, led by an experienced agent known as Sivaresan, also dubbed 'One-Eyed Jack' after losing an eye after a bomb detonation. The last step came on 19 June 1990, when the six-strong squad assaulted an EPRLF office in Kodambakkam, Madras, during a meeting involving several leaders. Using AK rifles and grenades, the assassins killed 14 EPRLF militants, including Kandasamy Padmanabha, the movement's leader. The hitmen then swiftly left the scene, switched vehicles by hijacking a van and withdrew safely to Jaffna during the next 48 hours.[5]

Although the local police became certain of LTTE culpability only much later, New Delhi ordered a new crackdown on the movement's clandestine infrastructure in Tamil Nadu in January 1991, but its extent was insufficient to do more than merely dent it. More importantly, it turned out that this crackdown did not in the least undermine the LTTE leadership's confidence in its ability to do as it wished in India without facing consequences.

Operation *Wedding*

By early 1991, the coalition that had unsettled the Rajiv Gandhi government at the end of 1989 was unravelling, while the Congress Party was widely expected to emerge victorious from the legislative elections that were to take place in the middle of the year. The probability of seeing Gandhi becoming prime minister again was increasing. He was unrepentant about the Indian intervention in Sri Lanka, as he explained in an interview in 1990:

> I know things did not work out the way they should have but the blame rests entirely on the LTTE and its leader. It would be delusional for the LTTE to think that they defeated the Indian Army. If we wanted, we could have finished the whole business.[6]

For the LTTE leadership – engaged in a new all-out war with Colombo since June 1990 – to have such a hostile Indian prime minister was an extremely worrying prospect, especially as a new Indian intervention, likely to be fatal for the movement, could not be ruled out. The LTTE leader decided to not take any chances and ordered the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, despite the objections of some of his closest lieutenants, who argued that this would trigger a devastating backlash. The task was entrusted to Pottu Amman. The head of the intelligence wing planned the operation, codenamed '*Wedding*', in utmost secrecy with Akila, one of his deputies, and a female cadre in charge of the women's intelligence wing. Pottu Amman and Akila finaly opted to use a Black Tiger: that is, a suicide-bomber.

By then, the movement's specialists were already able to design and

Thenmozhi Rajaratnam, alias Dhanu, underwent military training with the 7th Group of LTTE female cadres in India, and carried the flag during their graduation ceremony. (Jain Commission murder investigation)

Dhanu (second from left, with glasses) and Sivarasan (right, with glasses) minutes before the former blew herself up to kill Rajiv Gandhi. (Rohan Gunaratna Collection)

produce suicide-belts unique for their sophistication and effectiveness. In this case, the device included 500g of RDX explosives mixed with 10,000 0.2mm pellets, weighing another 500g. This charge, set in three layers of cloth that formed the belt itself, was to be activated by a wire connected to a 9-volt battery. To prevent accidents, the suicide-bomber had to press a first switch to arm the device, then a second to detonate the charge itself. To minimise the risk of their Black Tiger being searched by the target security detail, Akila and Pottu Amman opted to use a female suicide-bomber, selecting two candidates from among the female wing. The first, Dhanu, was tasked with the assassination, while the second, Subha, was to act as a backup if needed. The assassination team was placed under the command of Sivarasan (alias Chandrasekarampillai Packiyachandran), fresh from his successful attack against the EPRLF leadership. Surprisingly, the team included a photographer, tasked to take pictures during the attack. The team was also to operate independently from the LTTE political and intelligence wings' networks in Tamil Nadu, to keep Operation *Wedding* under a thick cloak of secrecy. To further hide their project behind a smoke screen, the LTTE dispatched several emissaries to Rajiv Gandhi, expressing the movement's willingness to reopen talks with him.[7]

A Bloody Evening

In September 1990, three operators were infiltrated into Tamil Nadu to make the necessary preparations for the operation, notably by setting up several safe houses and a separate radio station. On 12 May 1991, they assisted at an electoral meeting in Madras, where Rajiv Gandhi was also present, to collect intelligence, largely about the security detail surrounding the politician. On 1 May, the bulk of the assassination squad, nine people in total including Sivaresan, Dhanu and Subha, landed in Tamil Nadu. On 7 May, the team made a dry run at another political meeting held by V.P. Singh at Thiruvallur to test their *modus operandi*. On this occasion, Dhanu managed to approach the candidate unhindered and unchecked, pretending to pay her respects by putting a garland on his shoulders before kneeling at his feet.[8]

At last, on 21 May, the team launched the actual attack during a meeting held in Sriperumbudur. As planned, Dhanu managed to get close to her target, placing her garland around his neck before bending and detonating her suicide-belt, killing not only Rajiv Gandhi and herself, but 13 other people, while another three subsequently died of their wounds.

Once informed about the assassination, New Delhi swiftly mobilised the Central Bureau of Investigation to catch the culprits, and they in turn activated a Special Investigation Team led by Inspector General of Police D.R. Kaarthikeyan. While there were initially many hypotheses

about potential culprits – the LTTE being one among other possibles – the investigation progressed quickly, in large part thanks to a crucial mistake made by the assassination team. Their photographer followed the suicide-bomber too closely and was killed in the explosion. The police retrieved his camera and thus got clear images of the faces of Dhanu and Sivaresan.

With the Special Investigation Team close on its heels, the LTTE hit squad came under increasing pressure, while all attempts to exfiltrate it out of India went awry. On 9 June, a boat sent from Jaffna capsized and sank, killing seven insurgents. As a result, Sivarasan and his group had no choice but to connect with the political wing's clandestine structure to find shelter, but this only resulted in compromising the latter. In the end, the Indian police officers cornered not only the hit squad, but also large numbers of LTTE members in several locations. Virtually all the most important cadres and operators committed suicide by swallowing cyanide – as well as nearly 20 wounded militants sent to Tamil Nadu to receive medical treatment – while several others were captured alive. Having collected a large amount of evidence and many witnesses, the Indians proved that the LTTE as an organisation was guilty of Rajiv Gandhi's assassination.[9]

The final photograph showing Dhanu (lower right corner, back to the camera) approaching Rajiv Gandhi, only seconds before she activated her suicide vest. (Rohan Gunaratna Collection)

Fatal Backlash

It soon turned out that the LTTE had committed a blunder of major proportions. The police forces first almost completely dismantled the movement's support infrastructure in India, and then kept its remnants under scrutiny to prevent it from resurrecting. The assassination of Rajiv Gandhi shocked public opinion in India, even turning it against the LTTE in Tamil Nadu. In May 1992, India became the first major country to outlaw the LTTE and define it as a terrorist organisation. In the meantime, RAW began to exchange intelligence with the Sri Lanka security services. From that time on, the LTTE had to deal with the loss of a crucial rear base and deep hostility from the main regional power; arguably, this was to weigh heavily in the movement's ultimate demise almost 20 years later.[10]

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Notes

Introduction

1 Kalyanaraman, 2012, p. 32; Swamy, 1996, pp. 238-239.

Chapter 1

1 Kalyanaraman, 2012, p. 36.
2 The presence during previous years of Israeli, Pakistani or British advisors in Sri Lanka had been a source of considerable concern in New Delhi.
3 Dixit, 1998, pp. 84, 133; Gunaratna, 1994, p. 184; Raujesh, pp. 11–16; Wickremesekera, 2016, p. 63.
4 Swamy, 1996; Gunaratna, 1994, p. 187.
5 Balasingham, 2004, p. 106.
6 Ibid., p. 102.
7 This gentlemen's agreement between Velupillai Prabhakaran and Rajiv Gandhi remains a matter of controversy. For instance, the LTTE produced several contradictory statements, some acknowledging that it agreed to the accord in the end, and others that it had never done so. According to Balasingham, the Indian Prime Minister even conceded that the LTTE simply could "not accept, but not reject" the accord and did not need to disarm, as a mere "symbolic surrender of weapons would be enough". See Swamy, 1996, p. 246; Balasingham, 2004, pp. 107-108.
8 Pratap, 2001, p. 82; Swamy, 1996, pp. 238-239, 248; Raujesh, pp. 13, 25; Dixit, p. 158; Swamy, 2003, pp. 164-165; Balasingham, 2004, pp. 101-110; Kalyanaraman, p. 35; Kumar, pp. 71-72.
9 Ranatunga, p. 115.
10 Harkirat Singh, p. 29.
11 Raujesh, p. 14; Dixit, pp. 170, 174, 177; Gunaratna, 1994, p. 193; Gautam Das & M.K. Gupta-Ray, p. 42; O'Balance, pp. 92-93, Kumar, pp.68-69; Bennett, p. 52.
12 47th Brigade had been partially trained for airborne deployment, and 91st Brigade in amphibious operations. Strikingly, none of these units had received dedicated counter-insurgency training. Harkirat Singh, 2007, pp. 30-31; Das & Gupta-Ray, pp. 40, 48; Kumar, pp. 32-35.
13 Kumar, p. 81.
14 Harkirat Singh, 2007, pp. 31-35, 166-167; Das & Gupta-Ray, pp. 47-52; Kumar, pp. 79, 86-88, 92-93.
15 Harkirat Singh, 2007, pp. 29-30, 35, 122; Das & Gupta-Ray, pp. 52-54; Wickremesekera, 2016, p. 63.
16 Dixit, pp. 155-156.
17 Harkirat Singh, 2007, p. 32; Das & Gupta-Ray, pp. 46; Kalyanaraman, 2012, p. 33; Dixit, pp. 155-156; Singh, 2007, p. 32; Gunaratna, 1994, p. 237.
18 As well as the Eelam National Democratic Liberation Front (ENDLF), a recently created group by TELO and PLOTE breakaway factions, see *Broken Palmyra*.
19 The members of the Indian armed forces killed were Major Dilip Singh and Lieutenants Vickram and Mohinder Rao. Major Singh was a Tamil born in Jaffna. Strikingly, the LTTE intervened when Jaffna shop owners tried to collect funds for their dead families, and advised them to 'drop the idea'. See Swamy, 1996, p. 254; Gunaratna, 1994, p. 222.
20 Gunaratna, 1994, pp. 217, 222, 227; O'Balance, p. 95; Hennayake, p. 410; Swamy, 1994, pp. 254; 258; *Broken Palmyra*.
21 Swamy, 1996, pp. 251-253; Swamy, 2003, pp. 171, 174; Wickremesekera, 2016, p. 64; Kadian, pp. 27, 28; *Jain Commission Report*.
22 Hennayake, p. 411; Swamy, 1996, pp. 256, 263.
23 Notably, high-ranking officers of the IPKF concurred on this point with the LTTE; RAW was clandestinely arming other militants – without informing them. The Tigers even managed to produce video evidence of such deliveries to the CO of the 54th Air Assault Division. See Harikat Singh, 2007, p. 50. Otherwise, see Kadian, p. 28; Swamy, 2003, p. 172; *Broken Palmyra*; Swamy, 1996, pp. 255-259; Anton Balasingham, 2004, p. 115; Swamy, 1996, p. 255; Dixit, p. 209.
24 Swamy, 2003, pp. 167-177; Swamy, 1996, pp. 257, 260-262; Kadian, p. 30; Wickremesekera, 2016, p. 64; Hennayake, p. 41; *Broken Palmyra*; Harikharat Singh, 2007, p. 61; Das & Gupta-Ray, p. 62.
25 The militants who survived were those that swallowed the cyanide capsule without chewing it, thus giving the Indian medical personnel a few critical minutes to use stomach pumps (Das & Gupta-Ray, p. 64). Otherwise: Dissanayaka, p. 119; Balasingham, pp. 117-119; Dixit, pp. 209-211; Harikharat Singh, 2007, pp. 57-66; Das & Gupta-Ray, pp. 61-64; Swamy, 1996, p. 266; Swamy, 2003, pp. 179-180.

Chapter 2

1 Sources available about the JVP insurrection are scarce, to the point that most of the publications related to this subject are invariably relying on Gunaratna (2001), and C.A. Chandraprema (1991). Gunaratna, in particular, is widely acknowledged as having access to multiple sources among the Sri Lankan security services at the time. Furthermore, Moore, in his article from 1993, provides an excellent analysis on the JVP insurrection, while Owen Bennett also made a recent and important contribution – if only because he gathered the testimonies of several former JVP militants. In 2014, the JVP also published an official history, thus providing its own perspective.
2 Gunaratna, 2001, p. 141.
3 Gunaratna, 2001, pp. 120, 126, 127, 136, 138, 141, 144; Chandraprema, 1991, pp. 21, 44; Moore, pp. 608-609.
4 Gunaratna, 2001, pp. 15, 22, 63, 68, 141-145, 149-156, 176-178, 188-189; Chandraprema, 1991, pp. 46-48, 50-52, 55, 59-60; Moore, pp. 610-661; JVP Political Bureau, 2014, pp. 83, 94, 100, 101, 103.
5 The JVP's own historians described these as "half-hearted"; see JVP Political Bureau, 2014, p. 120.
6 Gunaratna, 2001, pp. 190, 197, 200-205; Chandraprema, 1991, pp.130, 132.
7 K. Gunaratne, p. 121. The Ramayana epic, literally 'Rama's journey', includes an episode when Rama the hero has to free his wife taken away by a Demon-King and held captive in Lanka, the latter's kingdom. To do so Rama, the Monkey-King Hanuman and his monkey army moved to the island from India to help Rama.
8 Testimony of 'Sanath', an anonymous JVP militant, interviewed by Owen Bennett, quoted in the latter's thesis, pp. 53-54.
9 Bennett, pp. 32, 42, 45, 51-54; Gunaratna, 2001, pp. 45, 70, 75, 270; Chandraprema, 1991, pp.101, 107-108, 114; JVP Political Bureau, 2014, p. 129.
10 Chandraprema, 1991, pp. 144, 150-151, 155, 158; Bennett, p. 54.
11 Chandraprema, 1991, pp. 4, 6-7, 15-17; Gunaratna, pp. 37, 39, 42, 44-45, 48, 58, 267; Moore, pp. 622-623. Moore, p. 622, compares the JVP organisation to that of a large international corporation, tailor-made to evolve in fast-changing markets. Notably; Gunaratna (2001) mentions another terminology on p. 324, based on the Gampaha district; the latter controlled four zones and these were divided into between four and 10 electorates.
12 According to the organisation table mentioned in Chandraprema, 1991, pp. 6-8.
13 Allegedly, the JVP's compartmentalised structure was inspired from that developed by the Basque ETA. Gunaratna, 2001, pp. 41, 315, 324-325; Chandraprema, 1991, pp. 6-8.
14 As mentioned previously, DJV was a JVP front organisation, and the People's Patriotic Armed Troops its armed wing. However, to avoid adding another acronym in a text already heavily using these, the term DJV is used to designate the JVP armed wing, as do most of the related publications. Thus, thereafter, the JVP is to be understood as the political party – DJV front included – while DJV is used to refer specifically to the armed wing, even if it would be more exact to mention the latter with the acronym PPAT.
15 Balakaya is also translated as 'Battalion'.
16 Chandraprema, 1991, pp. 17-19.
17 Chandraprema, 1991, pp. 18-19, 54, 133, 137; Gunaratana, 2001, pp. 37, 44, 220, 227, 231, 270, 324, 328.
18 Chandraprema, 1991, p. 169.
19 Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) in modern military parlance. Allegedly, instructors from the Tamil PLOTE initiated a few DJV militants to the landmine technologies they had developed while fighting against the Sri Lanka Army in the north during previous years. This was, however, always denied by the JVP.
20 Chandraprema, 1991, pp. 66, 133, 139-142, 187, 221, 228, 317; Moore, pp. 624, 633.
21 Gunaratna, 1994, p. 317.
22 Bennett, p. 55; Chandraprema, 1991, pp. 133, 136-37; Gunaratna, 2001, pp. 224, 270.
23 Moore, p. 613; Chandraprema, 1991, pp. 166-167, 172-173; Gunaratana, 2001, p. 270; Ravindra Fernando, 'Revisiting the 1987 Parliament bomb blasts', www.sundaytimes.lk, 19 August 2018, extracted 7 November 2018.

24 Chandraprema, 1991, p. 121. The author said that the victims were often beheaded or even burned alive and their bodies chopped into pieces.
25 Chandraprema, 1991, p. 289.
26 Gunaratna, 2001, pp. 225, 269-270, 272-275; Chandraprema, 1991, pp. 121, 123, 173-74, 177, 190; Moore, pp. 615, 628, 632, 635-236.
27 Chandrapema, 1991, pp. 200, 224, 277-78, 283; Gunaratna, 2001, p. 268.
28 Chandraprema, 1991, pp. 224, 231-32, 273-275, 277-278; Gunaratna, 2001, pp. 56-220, 268, 277, 289, 293-294; Moore, pp. 633-634.
29 Gunaratna, 2001, p. 276.
30 Chandraprema, 1991, pp. 177, 180, 184-190, 237; Gunaratna, 2001, pp. 229-230, 272, 276-280, 285, 347; Gunaratna, 1994, p. 318; Moore, p. 634.
31 Gunaratna, 1994, p. 318.
32 Gunaratna, 1994, pp. 318-319; the existence of two distinct attacks against the IPKF is confirmed by Bennett, p. 67.
33 Gunaratna, 2001, p. 268.
34 Moore, pp. 615, 625, 634, 640; Gunartana, pp. 267-268, 297-299, 312; Chandraprema, pp. 224-251, 257-261, 263, 265, 268-269, 273. According to the JVP's own official history, the movement broke contact with the SLFP in November 1988 because its leadership concluded that the latter party was merely attempting to use the JVP for its own purposes; see JVP Political Bureau, 2014, pp. 139-141.
35 'Sanath' testimonies, Bennett, pp. 55, 57.
36 'Nuwan', Bennett, p. 56.
37 These were the 1st and 4th Battalions, the Gemunu Watch Regiment, and the 1st and 3rd Battalions, the Sri Lanka Light Infantry Regiment, under overall command of Colonel Patrick Fernando. Gunaratna, 2001, p. 199.
38 Former JOSSOPS, see Volume 1 of this mini-series.
39 Marks, p. 615; Chandraprema, 1991, pp. 175, 199, 299-301; Gunaratna, 2001, pp. 277, 279, 294, 307, 321, 326.
40 Marks, p. 249.
41 Gunaratna, 2001, pp. 331-332; Marks, pp. 246-249; Chandraprema, 1991, pp. 300-301.
42 Chandraprema, 1991, p. 283, quotes the DJV bulletin issued in April 1989: "The blood relatives of the blood suckers in the Army and Police who are engaged in massacring patriots should take steps to stop this crime immediately. If they do not do so, the People's Patriotic Armed Troops will adopt merciless measures against them as well."
43 Gunaratna, 2001, p. 330; Chandraprema, 1991, pp. 263-264, 280, 283-286, 293, 295; Moore, p. 638.
44 Chandraprema, 1991, p. 293.
45 Chandraprema, pp. 238, 239, 240, 243; Gunaratna, 2001, pp. 274, 295, 297-298.
46 Chandraprema, p. 295.
47 Gunaratna, 2001, p. 296; Chandraprema, 1991, p. 296.
48 Chandraprema, 1991, p. 296.
49 Chandraprema, 1991, pp. 296, 312; Gunaratna, 2001, pp. 338-340; the numbers of casualties related to the second JVP insurgency are from Chandraprema, 1991, p. 312, who assessed these to be 40,000 dead, including 17,000 killed by the DJV and 23,000 by the security forces. It must be kept in mind that estimates of the total number of casualties tend to vary considerably, noticeably because countless people also 'disappeared'.
50 Gunaratna, 2001, p. 337.
51 Chandraprema, 1991, pp. 3023-10; Gunaratna, 2001, pp. 341-347; JVP Political Bureau, 2014, p. 147; Dharman Wickremaratne, 'JVP insurgency II: death strikes 724 bhikkus', lankaweb.com, 10 August 2015, extracted 22 November 2018.
52 Gunaratna, 2001, p. 334.

Chapter 3

1 De Soyza, p. 160.
2 The chronology of the events between 5 and 10 October tends to vary among the different authors who covered this period. The present narration crossed-referenced Swamy, 2003, p. 180; Swamy, 1996, p. 267; Kadian, p. 34; Gunaratna, 1994, p. 240; Harkirat Singh, p. 76; Das & Gupta-Ray, p65; and de Soyza, p. 161.
3 Balasingham, 1993.
4 Gunaratna, 1994, pp. 236, 240; Balasingham, p. 143; Balasingham, 1993; Das & Gupta-Ray, pp67, 73-74; Harkirat Singh, pp. 77, 81, 83, 88; Kadian, p. 37; Swamy, 1996, p. 268; de Soyza, p. 164.
5 Swamy, 2003, p. 185.
6 Harkirat Singh, pp. 77-78, 86-87.
7 Kumar, pp. 106, 140-141, 159; Das & Gupta-Ray, p. 82; Harkirat Singh, pp. 75-79, 84.
8 Swamy, 2003, p. 213.
9 Swamy, 2003, p. 213.
10 After the name of the LTTE women's wing.
11 Interview with a former LTTE militant under condition of anonymity, April 2018.
12 Harkirat Singh, pp. 147-150, 154-158; Das & Gupta-Ray, pp. 76, 160; de Soyza, pp. 166-167, 172, 184; Sardeshpande, pp. 25-30, 33; Swamy, 2003, pp. 185-186, 188, 190, 270-272; Gunaratna, 1994, pp. 234-244.
13 Sushant Singh, pp. 91-92; Bharat Kumar, pp.112-113; Das & Gupta-Ray, p. 89; Harkirat Singh, pp. 90-91.
14 Bharat Kumar, pp. 106-107; Das & Gupta-Ray, p. 90; Sushant Singh, pp. 92-93.
15 Sushant Singh, p. 94.
16 Para Commando Lok Ram, Sushant Singh, p. 110.
17 De Soyza, p. 172; Harkirat Singh, p. 92; Das & Gupta-Ray, p. 9; Bharat Kumar, pp. 115-121, 130; Sushant Singh, pp. 92-110; Jagan Pillarisetti, *Descent Into Danger – The Jaffna University Helidrop*, www.bharat-rakshak.com, 24 November 2009, extracted 22 November 2018.
18 Harkirat Singh, pp. 92-93; Das & Gupta-Ray, pp. 92-93; Sushant Singh, pp. 120-122.
19 Sushant Singh, pp. 114-122.
20 Sushant Singh, pp. 114-128, 136-137.
21 Sushant Singh, p. 131.
22 The third T-72, which had arrived in Palali earlier, had been used to support another unit, before joining its two brethren, which landed at 8:30 a.m. on 12 October.
23 Das & Gupta-Ray, p. 100.
24 Ibid., p. 106.
25 Ibid., pp. 106-108. Soon thereafter, Major Anil Kaul lost an eye and several fingers when a RPG round struck his tank but failed to penetrate the armour.
26 Sushant Singh, pp. 129-140, 143, 147; Das & Gupta-Ray, pp. 103-115.
27 Sushant Singh, p. 147.
28 S.C. Sardeshpande, p. 141.
29 Das & Gupta-Ray, p. 107.
30 Harkirat Singh, pp. 8-88; Das & Gupta-Ray, pp. 134, 136, 142.
31 De Soyza, pp. 183-185.
32 Harkirat Singh, pp. 89, 93; Das & Gupta-Ray, pp. 137, 168.
33 Harkirat Singh, pp. 95-100; Das & Gupta-Ray, pp. 143, 219.
34 Harkirat Singh, pp. 88-89; Das & Gupta-Ray, pp. 142, 224.
35 Harkirat Singh, pp. 88-89, 94; Das & Gupta-Ray, pp. 142-144, 151, 154, 185, 188–90, 196, 201, 213, 216, 218, 224; Swamy, 1996, pp. 274-275.
36 More than a decade later, the LTTE Political Committee published a year-by-year casualty list, and this document mentioned 451 fighters KIA in 1987, against 258 in 1986; see http://www.eelamweb.com/maveerar/statistics/, extracted 24 October 2016.
37 Kumar, pp. 154-155; Das & Gupta-Ray, pp. 236-239; Kadian, pp. 50-55; Tiwary, p. 287.
38 Kumar, pp. 151-152.
39 Tiwary, p. 289; Kumar, pp. 135, 141-144, 147-157, 200; Jagan Pillarisetti, *Crocodiles into the Attack – Mi-25s of 125 Heli Squadron*, http://www.bharat-rakshak.com, extracted 29 December 2018.

Chapter 4

1 Dixit, pp. 218, 232, 236-237; S.C. Sardeshpande, pp. 13, 44.
2 With tragic results; one LTTE high-ranking cadre and a RAW operative were killed in an IPKF ambush on one occasion; see Dixit, p. 233.
3 Dixit, pp. 233-234; S.C. Sardeshpande, p. 12.
4 Swamy, 1996, p. 238.
5 Dixit, pp. 236-237; S.C. Sardeshpande, pp. 12, 42–43, 53.
6 Kumar, pp. 173, 191, 200-220.
7 According to Das & Gupta-Ray, p. 242. It is striking that meanwhile, Sri Lankan Intelligence assessed IPKF strength at nearly twice these numbers, with around 100,000 men, as aside from these four divisions, the Sri Lankans identified the presence of both the 55th and 340th Independent Brigades – confirmed by Indian sources as well – but also three other brigades detached from other divisions, and various para-military forces. See Gunaratna, 1994, p. 269. Otherwise, Dixit, p. 216; Das & Gupta-Ray, pp. 242, 246, 255; S.C. Sardeshpande, pp. 31, 66-67; Gunaratna, pp. 256–58; Kumar, pp. 172–73, 187.
8 One example is that Indian patrols leaving their camps often noticed that nearby temples or churches were ringing their bells, and that the number of rings corresponded to the exact number of men in the patrol.
9 V.P. Singh, p. 181.
10 V.P. Singh, p. 186.

11 Das & Gupta-Ray, pp. 230, 248-250, 275, 276; S.C. Sardeshpande, pp. 10, 33, 54, 64; Rogan Gunaratna, 1994, p. 259.
12 Adele Balasingham, 2003, pp. 156-158, 167; Kumar, p. 140.
13 De Soyza, p. 227.
14 S.C. Sardeshpande, pp. 8-9, 18-19, 26, 29, 61.
15 Swamy, 1996, p. 278.
16 S.C. Sardeshpande, pp. 6, 8-9; Dixit, p. 235; Kumar, p. 224.
17 *Jain Commission Interim Report*, via tamilnation.org; Swamy, 1996, pp. 216-218; Kumar, pp. 252-255.
18 S.C. Sardeshpande, pp. 33, 55; Swamy, 1996, pp. 279-280; Adele Balasingham, 1993; Adele Balasingham, 2003, pp. 228-233.
19 Pradap, p. 89.
20 It is also widely reported that Velupillai Prabhakaran barely avoided capture or death on one occasion in February 1988 thanks to a desperate rearguard action fought his bodyguards, during which 12 of the latter were killed. See S.C. Sardeshpande, pp. 47, 67; Mendis, 2009, p. 108; Kumar, pp. 181-182, 192, 222, 233, 269; Kadian, p. 122; Gunaratna, 1994, pp. 256-259.
21 Kumar, p.224; Gunaratna, 1994, pp. 267, 275; Mendis, 2009, pp. 114-115; Kadian, p. 122.
22 Kumar, pp. 225, 231, 371.
23 As well as Operation *Mahaan Kartavya* in the east; Gunaratna, 1994, p. 275.
24 Kumar, pp. 229-230, 250; Das & Gupta-Ray, p. 246.
25 Kumar, pp. 248-249.
26 Kumar, pp. 225, 229-235, 237-252; Das & Gupta-Ray, p. 246; Mendis, 2009, pp. 117-119; Adele Balasingham, 1993; S.C. Sardeshpande, p. 77.
27 Until Sri Lankan President Jayewardene heard about the deal and ordered its cancelation. This unofficial agreement between SLA and LTTE units operating in Trincomalee is mentioned in Swamy, 1996, pp. 303-304.
28 Dixit, p. 236; S.C. Sardeshpande, p. 48; Kumar, pp. 209, 220, 258, 260; Mendis, 2009, pp. 111-112; V.K. Singh, pp. 177-178, 180-181.
29 Gunaratna, 1994, p. 258.
30 Kumar, p. 260; V.K. Singh, pp. 177–178.
31 Kumar, pp. 261, 264; Mendis, 2009, pp. 115, 117; V.K. Singh, pp. 182-186; S.C. Sardeshpande, pp. 47, 66.
32 *Jain Commission Interim Report*, via tamilnation.org.
33 Swamy, 1996, p. 289; Swamy, 2003, p. 196; *Jain Commission Interim Report*, via tamilnation.org.
34 See Volume 1 of this mini-series for more details about the LTTE's early 'shadow merchant fleet'.
35 *Jain Commission Interim Report*, via tamilnation.org; Hiranandani, pp. 192, 194.
36 Kumar, pp. 173, 177-179; Hiranandani, pp. 192-194.
37 Swamy, 2003, p. 196; Hiranandani, pp. 194, 196; S.C. Sardeshpande, pp. 57-59.
38 Dixit, p. 236, 252; S.C. Sardeshpande, pp. 77-79; Swamy, 1996, pp. 285-289; Kumar, pp. 264, 273, 278.
39 Furthermore, large numbers of inhabitants of the Province were not registered at all. S.C. Sardeshpande, pp. 79-80; Swamy, 1996, p. 289-291; Kumar, pp. 277-278.
40 Swamy, 1996, pp. 292-295, 298-299; Swamy, 2003, pp. 206-207; Kumar, p. 278.

Chapter 5

1 Unless stated otherwise, this chapter is based on Fontanellaz, '*Tempête sur les Maldives*', l'autre côté de la colline website.
2 For details on PLOTE, see Volume 1 of this series.
3 Tiwary, pp. 294-296.
4 Hiranandani, p. 199.
5 Tiwary, pp. 297-298.
6 Dixit, p. 265-266.
7 Hiranandani, p. 200.
8 Hiranandani, pp. 198-200.
9 From the LTTE for some, of from disgruntled militants from his own movement for others.

Chapter 6

1 Kumar, pp. 288, 293, 295; Mendis, 2009, pp. 120-121.
2 Kumar, pp. 296-297.
3 Sardeshpande, pp. 30, 87-88; Kumar, p. 334.
4 Swamy, 1996, pp. 299-302; Gunaratna, 1994, pp. 139, 171, 288; Balasingham, pp. 138-40, 145-46, 160, 171.
5 Swamy, 2003, p. 208; Rohan Gunaratna, p. 299; Kumar, pp. 310-311, 322; Mendis, 2009, p. 122.
6 Gunaratna, 1994, pp. 307-308; Kumar, p. 322.
7 According to Balasingham himself, the request came after the beginning of Operation Toofan, but Indian sources all mentions that Sri Lankan government weapon deliveries began much before that, at the end of March 1989. Balasingham, 2004, pp. 175-176; Dixit, p. 288.
8 Swamy, 1996, p. 303.
9 Swamy, 1996, p. 303; Swamy, 2003, pp. 208-209, T.D.S.A. Dissanyaka, p. 135; Gunaratna, 1994, pp. 300-304; Anton Balasingham, 2004, pp. 175-176; Cyril Ranatunga, pp. 128-131.
10 The initial withdrawal date had, however, to be delayed from 31 December 1989 to 31 March 1990.
11 Kumar, pp. 326, 337-339, 342; Swamy, 1996, pp. 300-302; Swamy, 2003, p. 210; Dixit, p. 29; Hiranandani, pp. 195-196; Das & Gupta-Ray, p. 255.
12 The previous withdrawal of 2,500 men on 7 June 1988, 3,600 on 9 January 1989 and 900 on 8 February 1989 was widely publicised, but this was for public consumption as these were simply part of a rotation plan with arriving forces replacing the withdrawing ones. See Kumar, pp. 331, 333.
13 Das & Gupta-Ray, pp. 260-261, 266; Kumar, pp. 342, 346, 352, 356-358.
14 Sardesphande, p. 84.
15 Swamy, 1996, pp. 304-305; Gunaratna, 1994, p. 355; Sardeshpande, pp. 81-85.
16 Kadian, p. 134; Swamy, 1996, pp. 302-310; Swamy, 2003, p. 208; Gunaratna, pp. 355-368. Virtually all sources describing the TNA draw from Gunaratna's 1994 book. Interestingly, the latter also mentions the existence of TNA units such as the 'Singing Fish Regiment' and even a 'Rocket Artillery Corps'.
17 The police officers had been instructed by Vettivelu Yogeswaran to let the three LTTE militants come in without being searched. Swamy, 1996, p. 209; Munasinghe, pp. 33-34.
18 Swamy, 2003, p. 210.
19 Swamy, 1996, pp. 307-309; Gunaratna, 1994, pp. 360-361, 366-367.
20 Swamy, 1996, pp. 309-316; Swamy, 2003, pp. 210, 215-216; Gunaratna, 1994, pp. 369-370, 382; Wickremesekera, 2016, pp. 67-68; Adele Balasingham, 2002, pp. 255, 263; P. Javaram, 'As IPKF pulls out of Sri Lanka, LTTE tightens its grip', *Indian Today*, 31 January 1990.

Postscript

1 Kumar, p. 361; Gunaratna, 1994, p. 292; Dixit, p. 29; Kaarthikeyan & Raju, p. 177; LTTE Political Committee, via http://www.eelamweb.com.
2 Accused of being a RAW agent and to have plotted to assassinate the movement leader in 1993, Mahattaya was subsequently executed on 28 December 1994 (see Balasingham, 2002, pp. 296–298). The information that Kittu and Mahattaya were turned by RAW at the time comes from Indian journalist Neena Gopal (pp. 149-150, 157-158, 162), according to the latter's interviews with former Indian intelligence officers. However, according to journalist Swamy (2003, p. 244) it was virtually impossible that a die-hard loyalist such as Kittu would had betrayed the movement, even for a monthly stipend of (allegedly) US$30,000. Hence, if indeed on RAW's payroll, Kittu would have been used by the LTTE intelligence wing to feed wrong information to the Indian Intelligence agency.
3 Swamy, 2003, p. 213.
4 Aside from the TNRT, the LTTE allegedly supported another, even lesser-known Tamil group, the Tamishar Pasarai (Bastion of Tamils) and even the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), active in Assam. Swamy, 2010, endnote, p.xxxiv; Neena Gopal, p. 58; Kaarthikeyan & Raju, pp. 110-111; https://www.satporg/satporgtp/countries/india/terroristoutfits/TNRT.htm, extracted 26 March 2019.
5 Gopal, pp. 39-40, 46; Kaarthikeyan & Raju, pp. 35-36, 42, 76-77, 181-182; R. Parthasarathy, 'A Massacre in Madras', *Tamil Times*, No.9, 15 July 1990.
6 Swamy, 2003, p. 223.
7 The Indians believed the real identity of Dhanu to be Thenmozhi Rajaratnam. According to journalist D.B.S. Jeyaraj, Sivarasan was a former TELO militant who had rallied to the LTTE where he acted as a tax-collector, before becoming a combatant in the military wing and finally attached to the intelligence wing. He lost an eye while fighting Sri Lankan troops during Operation *Liberation* in 1987. See D.B.S. Jeyaraj, '"One-eyed Sivarasan" The Mastermind Behind Rajiv Gandhi's Assassination', http://dbsjeyaraj.com/dbsj/archives/46789, 26 May 2016, extracted 25 March 2019. Otherwise, Swamy, 2003, pp. 211, 220, 223-225; Swamy, 2010, p.Lii; Kaarthikeyan & Raju, pp. 22-23, 136, 156; Gopal, pp. 46, 98, 102.
8 Gopal, pp. 89, 93, 98-99; Kaarthikeyan & Raju, pp. 47, 133.
9 For an in-depth narration of the investigation by the head of the Special Investigation Team, see Kaarthikeyan & Raju.
10 Swamy, 2003, pp. 231-234; Swamy, 2010, p.liii.

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